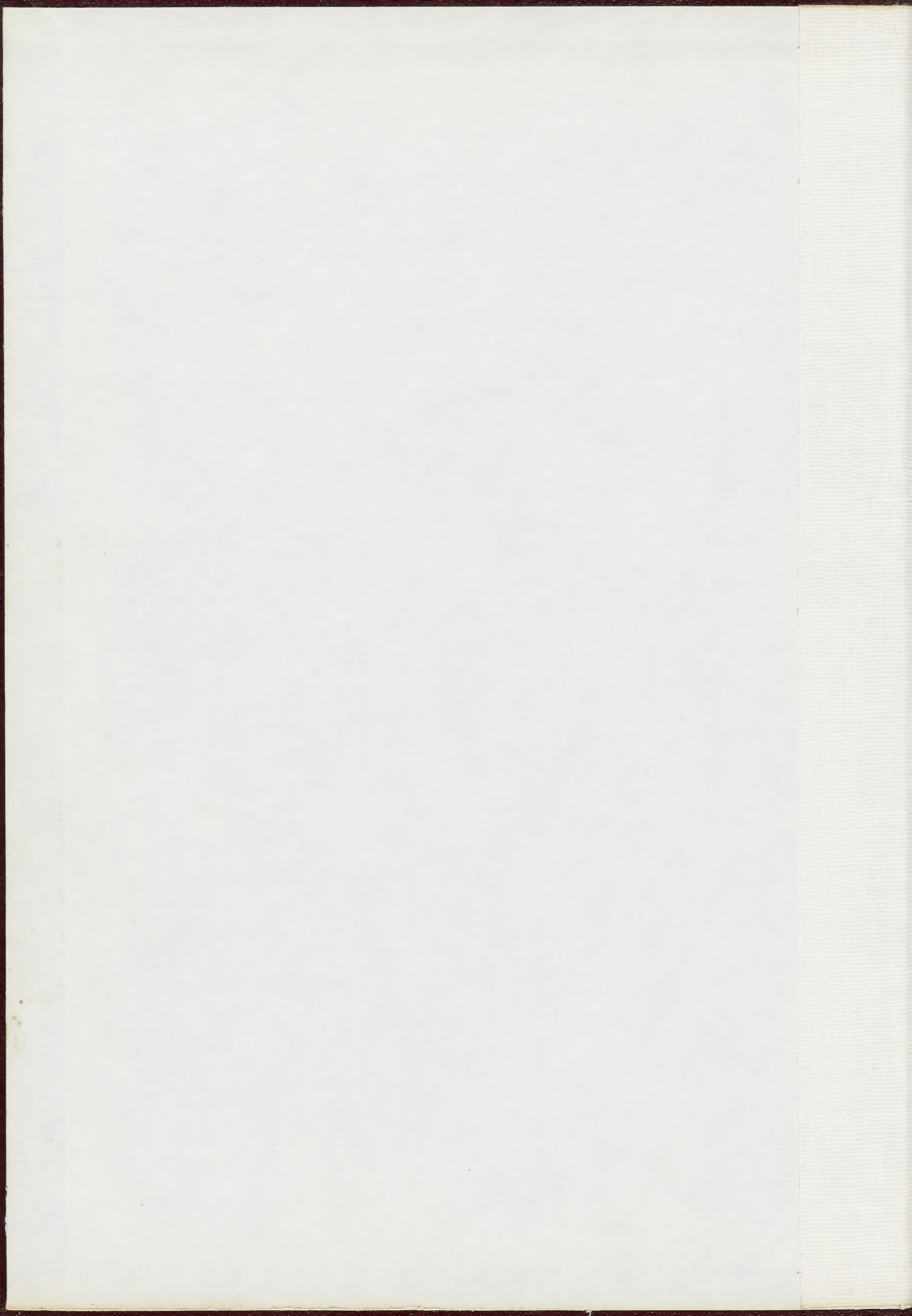


RACE TODAY

1980

DARCUS HOWE





Race Today

VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN

MAY/JUNE 1980

35p

Groundings
from
Guyana

From bobby to babylon

Blacks and the British Police



LETTERS

Dear Race Today,

Any legal system which fails to guarantee the safety and social well-being of its subjects foster disobedience and social instability.

There is no doubt in the minds of a great number of Jamaicans that I have been denied the right to benefit from the doubts which were inherent in the trial against me for the murder of Clifton Stephenson in June 1972.

The faulty trial commented in the court based solely on the evidence of a female juvenile, whom it is evident should not be given credit as someone capable of being truthful; this was inferred by her frequent stuttering in the court and her failure to make positive statements without being coaxed and forced to do so. I was, however, on this basis of her evidence alone, convicted and sentence to die by hanging. My appeal to the Jamaica Court of Appeal was turned down.

Again the people petitioned; this time the Jamaica Privy Council calling upon this other almighty body to ensure that justice is done and I be freed, pointing out that the unreliable witness who had been reluctant to testify against an innocent man, had retracted to the pricking of her conscience developed while maturing, and had clearly denied upon

oath her alleged statement to the police implicating me with the murder of Stephenson.

However, the Privy Council instead reacting in the expected manner and turn back the case to the court for a judicial hearing, elected only to refer it to the court seeking the court's opinion. Thereby undermining the power of the court to determine the innocence or guilt of the accused and thus act accordingly.

The result of this unscrupulous decision deprived me of the means which were necessary for my attorneys to present an appropriate defence. It deprived the masses of the right to be informed.

All my appeals were turned down and it was said I should die by hanging.

Following this, however, a massive public disapproval campaign was launched bordering on internationality to 'Free Michael Bernard' pressures from a wide cross-section of the society resulted in a compromising stand by the Governor General and Privy Council in their decision not to kill me, but instead to keep me in prison for life. No reason was given to the general public for this decision.

I now languish in prison for a crime which no one can creditably prove was ever committed by me. A crime of which the majority of Jamaicans familiar with the case are assured of my innocence.

Michael Bernard. Jamaica

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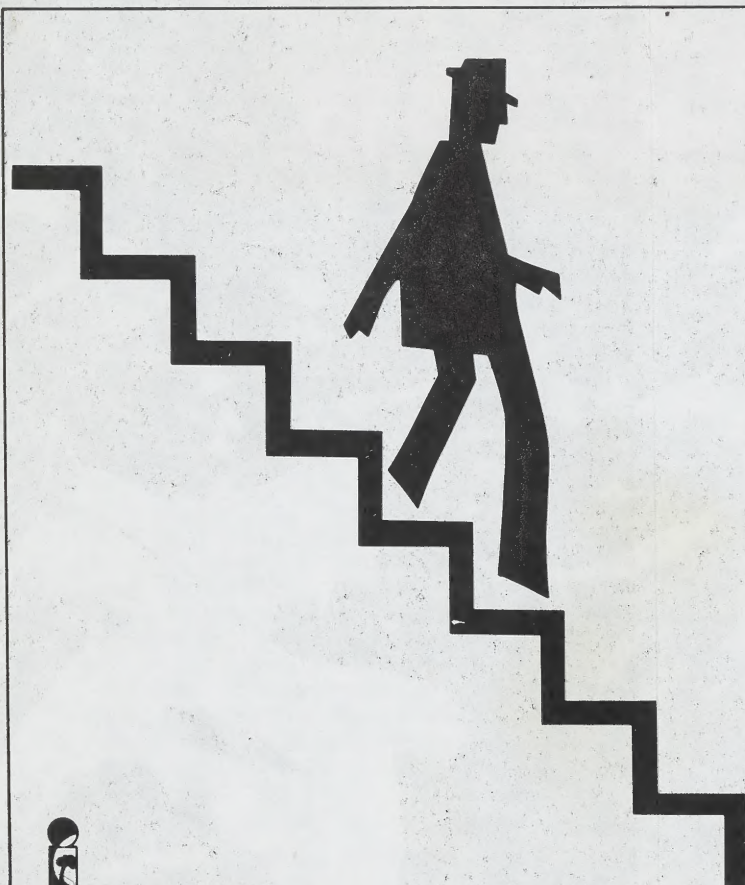
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NEW ALBUM

EDITORIAL

Policing in Manchester

Those of us who criticised and organised against police malpractice in Manchester, in 1979, are deemed by James Anderton, Chief Constable of Manchester, in his yearly report, to have indulged in "unusually vicious propaganda carried to extremes against the police". 'The Times' 13.5.80.

As a result of our activities, Anderton says, the police were required to "defend what need not be defended; to answer what did not have to be questioned; to explain what was already known and abundantly clear; and to account for matters to an exceptional and unreasonable degree."

And finally, Anderton outlines what he describes as "the paramount truth" which has to be faced:

"It is the duty of the state to protect its police. . ."

The Race Today Collective, the Bradford Black Collective, The Black Parents Movement and the Black Youth Movement are among those whom Anderton describes as having indulged in "unusually vicious propaganda carried to extremes against the police".

The Alliance of organisations outlined above had cause, in 1979, to take on the Manchester police and expose its corrupt malpractices in the black community when Darcus Howe, the Editor of 'Race Today', was summoned by James Anderton to answer a charge, at Manchester Magistrates Court, of obstructing police officers from Anderton's Vice Squad.

In the campaign which led up to the trial, we propagandised that Anderton's officers were involved in framing Darcus Howe; that Anderton himself, the signatory to the summons, was implicated in the frame up attempt.

As the trial progressed, it was revealed that Constables Hazlehurst and Griffiths of the Manchester Vice Squad were drunk while on duty and that they were authorised by senior officers "to have a drink" in the course of their work. It was revealed, also, that Sgt. Booth, Hazlehurst and Griffiths concocted evidence and perjured themselves in court. A crowded public gallery heard that two of these officers, Hazlehurst and Griffiths, behaved like thugs as they bullied their way into a private function; that they racially abused the organisers; that, on gaining entry, they spent the rest of the evening guzzling alcohol at the bar and, to this day, have not given any legal reason why they entered the club on that evening.

A perfectly orderly and entertaining event was transformed into disorder and chaos by two drunken officers from Mr Anderton's police force.

In the course of our campaign, we discovered that thousands of black Mancunians, in their homes, at their places of work, in their social organisations were themselves engaged, when articulating their experiences at the hands of the Manchester police, in what Mr Anderton would dismiss as "unusually vicious propaganda".

In short, there exists, in Manchester, a large movement of blacks against the malpractices of Mr Anderton's boot boys.

Mr Anderton pits himself and the resources of his organisation against this movement. He is ensured thousands of words in 'The Times' newspaper

through which to air his propaganda, and he thunders against having to defend what need not be defended. We can only surmise that he is furious at being called to account by the black community for the behaviour of the likes of Hazlehurst, Griffiths and Booth. He is indignant at having to answer when the behaviour of his officers are questioned and he rails against having to account for matters to an "exceptional and unreasonable degree."

Mr Anderton needs to be told that we pay his wages, finance his computers, helicopters and the vast paraphernalia of equipment with which he tortures the population of Manchester, and it is to them that he is responsible, it is to them that he has to account to the nth degree, and that a vigilant and alert community must ensure that the leash by which he is held is made of the strongest metal.

And against us Mr Anderton has called for protection from the state. So that when his police officers, Booth, Hazlehurst and Griffiths, were found to be lying through their teeth, it was the responsibility of the magistrates to protect them and find Mr Howe guilty. The fact that Darcus Howe was found not guilty, and that £200 costs were awarded against the Manchester police, would be described by Mr Anderton as something akin to subversion.

No doubt he reckons that he has achieved an enormous victory in having both Labour and Tory governments as protectors of his kind. And we are not only making reference to the Chief Constable of Manchester. In fact, the Association of Chief Constables (ACPO) faithfully parrots Anderton's views and has managed to win protection from other agencies of the state.

What is without question is that there exists, in this land, an overwhelming black rebellion against police malpractice.

For the last ten years, the black rebellion against the Manchester police has been distorted and deformed by the project mentality of its activists. That is to say that black political activism in Manchester has channelled the forces of rebellion into several government funded projects.

The signs are that the campaign to free Darcus Howe, which successfully exposed the corrupt practices of the Manchester police, has had the effect of charting a new course through which Mr Anderton and his police force are thrown off the backs of the black population.

Mr Anderton must be made to face, in the '80's, propaganda of a kind he has never experienced in his career; he must be made to explain, answer and account to a black population which will develop its vigilance, alertness and actions against the Booths, the Hazlehursts and the Griffiths of this world.

So long as the mass movement in the black community remains unorganised and diffuse, then Anderton would continue to claim and to win that protection from the state which is rightfully ours.

Race Today Collective
May 1980

Six times framed,

Darcus Howe, Editor of 'Race Today', Chairman of the Carnival Development Committee and of the George Lindo Action Committee, was acquitted by the Manchester Magistrate's Court of the charge of Obstruction brought against him by the Manchester police and awarded costs in the sum of £200.

The decision of the Manchester Magistrates vindicated our statement that the charge of Obstruction brought 4 months after the event by the Manchester police on the evidence of Police Sgt. Booth, Police Con. Hazlehurst and Police Con. Griffiths of the Moss Side Vice Squad, was simply a crude frame up.

The suspicion of the Darcus Howe Action Committee is that Mr Howe was being penalised for his work as Chairman of the George Lindo Action Committee. George Lindo was freed after 13 months false imprisonment for armed robbery on frame up charges brought by officers Brierley, Craven and Jackson of the Bradford police. Darcus Howe and the George Lindo Action Committee were very active in the campaign to free George Lindo.

Finally, by awarding costs in keeping with the practice direction of the Lord Chief Justice in 1973, the decision of the magistrates indicates that Darcus Howe did not bring the police charge upon himself but that the police acted either spitefully or without reasonable cause and costs were therefore awarded against them.

Outside the court some forty blacks picketed chanting slogans "Five times framed — Five times freed". "Darcus innocent — Police guilty". "Remember George Lindo — stop framing blacks; Now Darcus Howe — stop framing blacks".

The court authorities moved the case to a larger court in order to accommodate the large numbers of supporters who crammed the court. Clapping broke out when the Magistrates gave their 'not guilty' verdict.

JUDGE'S INTERVENTION STOPS DARCUS HOWE'S CASE JUDGE WEST-RUSSELL MUST BE REMOVED

Darcus Howe, the Editor of 'Race Today' and Chairman of the Carnival Development Committee and of the George Lindo Action Committee, was scheduled to appear at the Inner London Crown Court on March 10 to answer charges of Burglary (that he entered 60 Mayall

Road with intent to commit a felony) and Grievous Bodily Harm to a Michael Dixon of 60 Mayall Road.

A Darcus Howe Action Committee was formed to fight what the committee describes as 'Criminal Charges for Political Purposes'.

From March 5 through to March 13, there unfolded a series of bizarre events which support our theory that the charges against Darcus Howe have no basis in fact and are political in nature.

LET US FOLLOW THIS THROUGH

On March 4, two police officers visit the office of 'Race Today'. One of them leaves his name, Detective Constable Judge, and the phone number of Scotland Yard. He claims to be a member of Scotland Yard's Community Relations Section, hardly a place for detectives. We believe that he and his companion are members of the Special Branch.

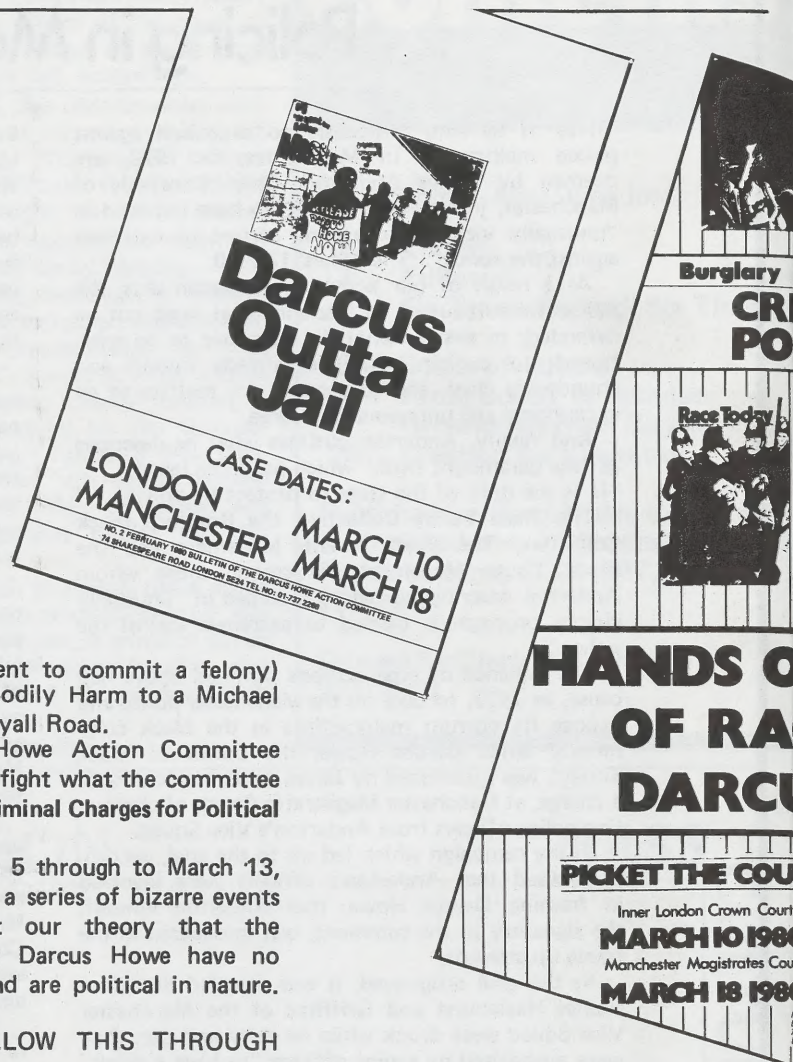
They questioned defence witnesses in Darcus's case about the nature of the demonstrations to be held during the trial and how many demonstrators would be present. The defence witnesses cannot and do not give any information to these officers.

On March 5, the same two police officers return to RT's office stating that they were informed about a demonstration in support of Darcus at the Inner London Crown Court on March 10. Their informants, they claimed, were officers from the Community Liaison Department at Brixton Police Station. They ask about

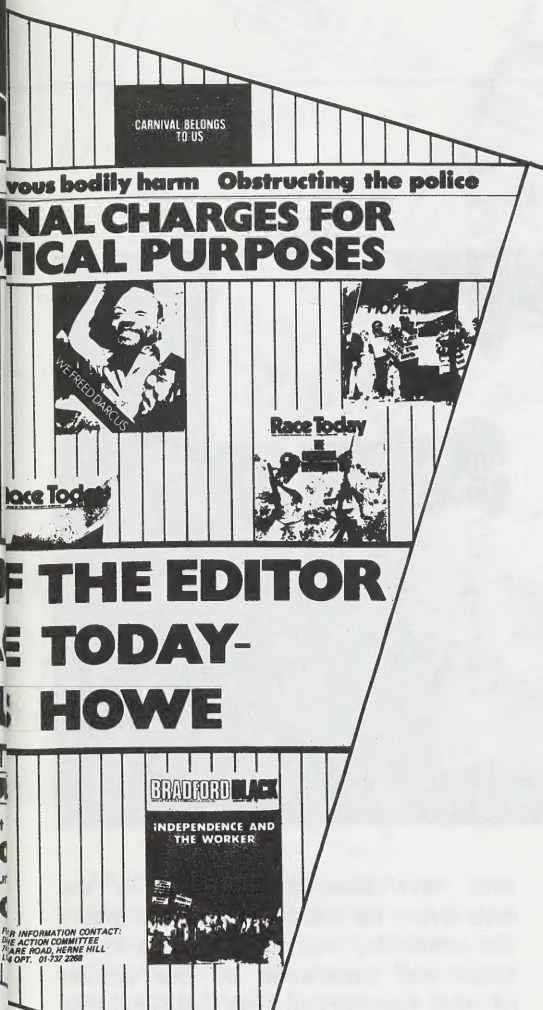
details of the demonstration and/or any literature produced by the Action Committee. Again they question defence witnesses.

On March 6, Darcus keeps an appointment with his barrister. In the course of the conference, a representative from the firm of solicitors, Clinton Davis & Co., telephones to say that he has someone from the Lists Office at Inner London Crown Court on the line. The caller from the Lists Office is saying that the case cannot go on as scheduled on March 10 and has to be postponed. The reason is that Judge West-Russell, the senior judge at the Inner London Crown Court, has read the papers of the case and because he has read the papers he wants to hear the case.

Darcus advises both his solicitor and barrister that he cannot guarantee the presence of his witnesses for the new date



Six times freed



they are proposing — March 29. The caller from the Lists Office states that he will consult the judge and get back to them.

On March 7, the Lists Officer calls back and proposes April 9. All these new dates are for the convenience of Judge West-Russell who is determined to reserve the case for himself only because he has read the papers. We again decline because all the defence witnesses are not available. It must be remembered that the case was fixed some six months before, in October '79 to be precise, to ensure the presence of defence and prosecution witnesses.

Later that evening, a member of the Darcus Howe Action Committee attends a party given by some lawyers. No fewer than 10 lawyers express their utter amazement at the Judge's intervention and bizarre turn of events.

Firstly, a judge reserves a case, they tell us, only when he has heard part of

Darcus Howe faced two court cases during the month of March. He was acquitted of obstructing police by Manchester Magistrates Court, and awarded £200 costs.

On March 13 he was due to answer charges of Burglary and Grievous Bodily Harm at Inner London Crown Court. The case was postponed because of the unprecedented intervention of Judge West-Russell, senior judge at that court. The Darcus Howe Action Committee published the following statements on these cases.

it before. Secondly, he reserves a case for himself only when complex legal technicalities demand a specialist handling of the matter. Darcus's case falls into neither category.

The question is posed: why does Judge West-Russell have such a personal interest in this simple and straightforward matter? And again, once he reveals a personal interest, is it not clear that he ought not to hear the case at all?

March 10: The barrister's clerk, having been informed that the next date at which all defence witnesses would be available would be after the second week in November, proceeds in the normal way to negotiate a new fixture. He is told that the Judge has received some telegrams "which did not wish him a happy birthday". As a result, an application to fix a date has to be made in open court. We are told that the Judge claims it is now a matter of security, whatever that means.

March 13: Both prosecution and defence turn up at the Inner London Crown Court No.1. West-Russell is sitting. Before the judge enters the prosecutor expresses surprise that the Judge is seeking to reserve such a simple matter for himself. "Why all the fuss?" she questions.

Soon she is beckoned outside and returns a different woman. She is carrying a copy of a telegram. She addresses the court saying that Darcus is a well-known person and the case should be heard as soon as possible. She is ready to

proceed on April 9.

Meanwhile, the judge asks who is making the application to fix. The prosecutor replies that it is a mutual application, ie. made by both prosecution and defence. Not true. It is the Lists Office and the Judge who had conjured up the application.

Darcus's counsel addresses the court with all the evidence at his disposal. The case cannot be heard until November because our witnesses will not be available.

The judge refuses. He says that he is not prepared to wait until November. It is the fault of Darcus' friends, who sent the telegrams which were threatening. That is why the case has had to be postponed. He states that the defendant could not be held responsible for the telegrams. He informs us that these threats were of such a nature that the case has to be heard in a secure court, and that since his court is the only secure court in the building it has to be heard there. No longer the excuse that he has read the papers. Such an excuse would not hold water since the most junior judge could read the papers in 5 minutes.

The judge eventually sends the prosecution and defence to the Lists Office to agree a new date. The defence cannot agree any date other than after the second week in November. A date is agreed convenient to the Judge and the Prosecution. Darcus is to go to court on May 20 but without one of his witnesses who is most crucial to his defence.

We believe that by his actions Judge West Russell has declared an interest in this case. It would be inappropriate for him to hear the case since it would be a threat to the civil rights of Darcus Howe. West-Russell must either remove himself or be removed from this case.

Also, we have been offered, in the space of 7 days, two conflicting reasons as to why the case should be postponed. Neither of which makes any sense. In order that justice is seen to be done, we demand that a new date be fixed, after the second week in November when all Darcus's witnesses could be present since the postponement from March 10 is no fault of his own.

Issued by the Darcus Howe Action Committee on March 31, 1980. Further information from John La Rose, 01-272 4889. 74, Shakespeare Road, London, SE24 OPT.

BRIXTON'S BATTLE OF JERICHO

Once the young black members of the Railton Youth Club in Brixton were assured by the Methodist Church and the Inner London Education Authority that the youth club would remain open and facilities would continue to be made available to the young blacks in the community, the Railton Youth Club Action Committee called off their three month occupation of the club's premises.

The occupation was set in motion on February 8, 1979 when, without notice to or consultation with members, the Methodist Church, who owns the premises, and the Inner London Education Authority, which finances the club's facilities, suspended the youth leader and closed the club down.

The struggle to have the club reopened and the facilities restored was waged under the slogan, 'Railton Belongs to Us' and the Railton Youth Club Action Committee was formed to give voice to the demands of the membership and to coordinate the campaign.

Once the demands were won, the Action Committee generously offered to cooperate with the authorities in the process of rebuilding a vibrant youth club. To this end, the Action Committee drafted a constitution through which the club could be democratically reorganised, and suggested to the authorities a programme which would excite the black youth in the community to action.

In the pre-amble to the constitution, the Action Committee identified the decline in membership and the stagnation in activity to which the club had descended in the previous three years. [This decline] "is due primarily to the fact that the initiative and years of experience of the membership was no longer being brought to bear on the development of its own activities. This situation is further compounded by the fact that the club's constitution does not provide for the fullest, disciplined participation of the membership in the management of its own affairs".



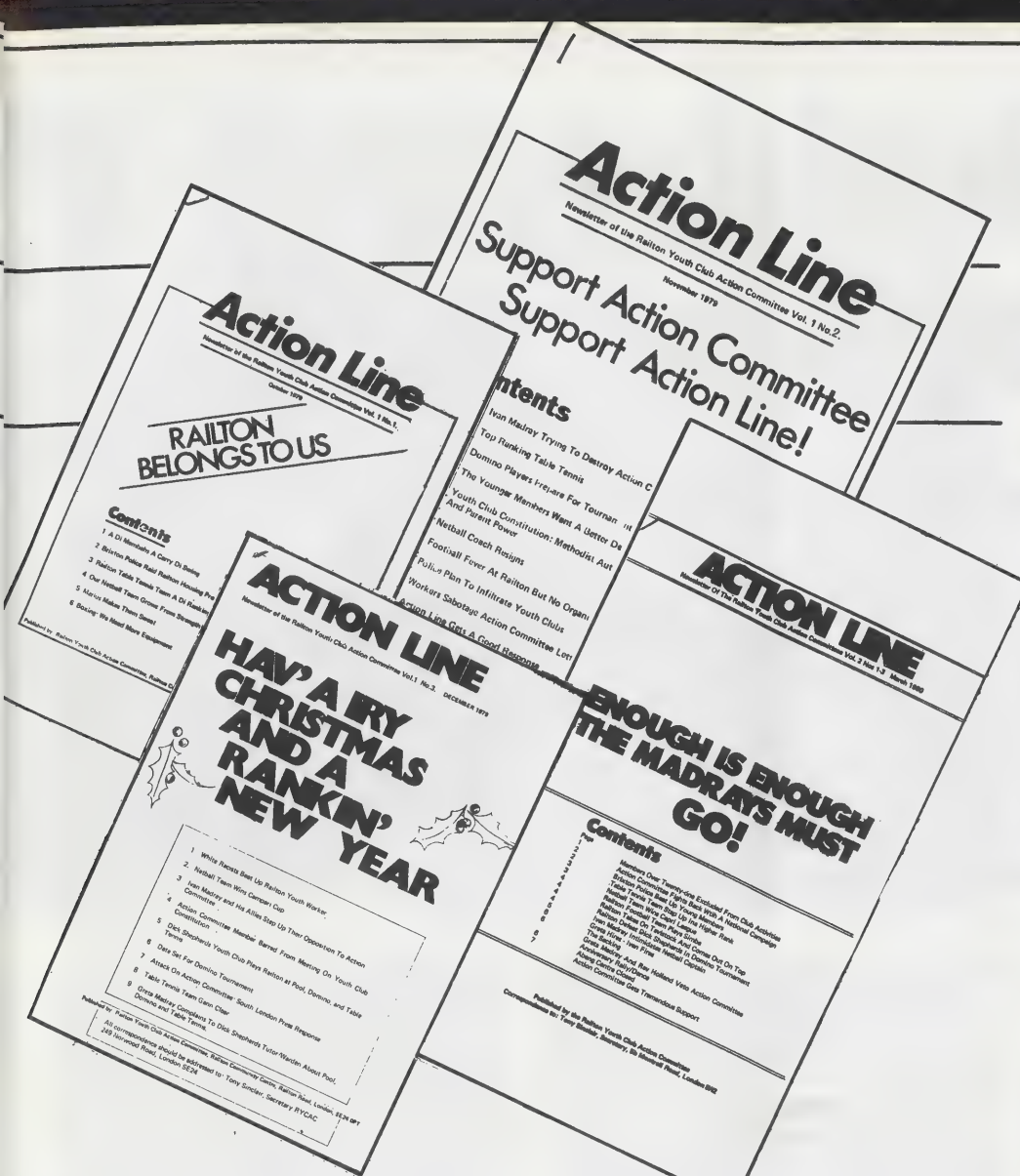
It was the first and has since been the only serious attempt at analysing the difficulties into which the club had found itself and the reasons which underlined them. It is a forthright statement coming from an organisation which had obviously arrived at a great deal of clarity in the struggle into which it was forced by the authorities. To this day, no one has emerged from the management's cabal to deny or indeed to question the fundamental proposition contained in the statement.

Having identified the crisis and the reasons for it, the organisation of the membership followed through with the solution. The Action Committee proposed a new constitution which would mobilise and bring order to the vast experience which has been existing in the club throughout its 15 year history. The position is brilliantly outlined: "We cannot look for continuity in the workers because they come and go. Some are promoted, some get married, some are fired. We cannot look for continuity in the Minister/Warden. They, too, change from time to time. The membership, on the other hand, has, in its older members, people

who have been participating in the club since its inception. That is where the continuity exists. . . . The knowledge and experience of this section of the membership, we believe is of enormous value and importance to the management of the club's affairs, and is, moreover, the only way to consolidate and build upon the history and achievement of the club. The participation of the younger members, who bring a new experience to bear on the club's development, goes without saying".

The old order must go. The bevy of officials from the I.L.E.A. and the Methodist Church, who comprised the management committee, had presided over the club in its period of decline. They were seen to be bankrupt of ideas and, as a consequence, ham fisted and oppressive in their management of the club's affairs. Older members, young members would form the basis of the new to which the old must give way.

But this is not all, adds the Action Committee: "We also feel that participation of parents in the management of our activities is of great importance. They have a wealth of experience and skills from which we could benefit."



four parents but two. How have they arrived at these figures, no one knows, but obviously the mean, calculating spirit is at work bent on ensuring a majority on the new management committee. Robert Mugabe knows the type well from his dealings at countless, constitutional sittings at Lancaster House.

The subversion of the revolutionary upsurge of the membership to control its own affairs does not end with constitutional manipulation and manoeuvre. Month after month, 'Action Line' has documented the meanness and disruption practised by the Holy Alliance of Church and State. When the youth leader is not issuing threats to members that they dissociate themselves from the Action Committee, he is firing Action Committee members and supporters from jobs which are under his control. Mail headed for the Action Committee have gone astray, references for workers are refused, permission to use the premises are denied, disruption of joint youth club activities are on the order of the day.

And finally, the coup de grace. At a management committee meeting of February 11, 1980, the youth leader, Ivan Madray, proposes a ban on all youth club members over 21. He knows that the overwhelming majority of Action Committee members are over 21. The management committee accepted his proposal.

This decision has triggered off a national campaign, announced in the current issue of 'Action Line', to have the decision rescinded. Fierce statements of protest have been pouring into the offices of the Methodist Authorities from all over the country. More than 50 youth workers, from youth clubs and projects as far away as Sheffield, Manchester and Newcastle have petitioned against the ban. Not for these youth workers a mere show of solidarity informed by some abstract adherence to ideology. All of them work in youth clubs and projects whose policies are tied to hide-bound, reactionary colonial ideas. The Railton Youth Club Action Committee has shown them the way out and their support flows from that self-interest. Artists, parents, teachers, youth organisations have expressed their fullest support for the campaign.

The violent frustration which has been developing inside the Railton Youth Club in the last year is bound to explode if the old order insists on maintaining its stranglehold over the club's affairs. Ironical though it may seem, the Battle of Jericho has to be fought all over again and it is the walls of the Methodist Church that will come crumbling down.

Mindful of the fact that the term participation is much touted and abused in our society as mere disguise and window-dressing, the Action Committee goes on to legitimise its proposals by writing them into the proposed constitution.

In article 3 they state: Membership of the management committee shall include:

- Six youth club members, three aged between 14 and 21 years of age, and three aged over 21, to be elected annually by the membership.
- From parents who are willing to serve on the committee.

The Action Committee is merciless in its appreciation of its own limitations. They do not propose the wanton destruction of the old traditions and experiences gathered in the history of the youth service in Britain. Wisely, they seek to incorporate these into the new order. To the main body of older members, young members and parents, they add the senior youth worker, two part-time workers, elected annually by part-time workers, three representatives, nominated or elected by the Church Council annually, the Minister/Warden, one representative appointed by the Inner

London Education Authority Youth Committee, the Area Youth Officer and/or the Youth Officer for Lambeth in an advisory capacity only and finally, the club's treasurer.

Throughout this process of constitution drafting, of discussions and meetings between the Action Committee and the authorities, the Committee has launched its monthly publication, 'Action Line' and proceeded to organise its programme of activities while supporting other struggles being waged by the membership.

How have the authorities responded to what can only be described as the revolutionary and vibrant approach of the membership? On the issue of the constitution, they have reacted with counter-proposals, minus preamble, which are lame in comparison to the proposals of the membership. We look in vain for some explanation of the crisis into which the club has descended and the way out of it. Instead a constitution is slung around the necks of the membership, stating nothing that is new, replete with bureaucratic jargon. They have resorted to tinkering with numbers. Not six youth club members but four, not

From bobby to babylon

Blacks and the British police

There exists, today, in every corner of Britain, a sharp and open political struggle against police malpractices throughout the country. That the struggle has reached the present stage owes much to the continued resistance of the black community over the last 25 years. Any demands to emerge presently must necessarily incorporate the experience of the black community from the mid-fifties to today. In the first part of a two part article, Darcus Howe, editor of *Race Today*, traces the course of the development of the struggles waged by the black community from the mid-1950's and assess the forces which our struggles have generated.

Perhaps the institution most paraded by British rulers as exemplifying the best in their democratic traditions has been the police force. 'The best of its kind in the world', 'the finest police force of all time', 'an exemplary institution', are but a few examples of the sentiments with which this institution has been regaled. And towering above all police forces in the history of our modern age, they tell us, is that quintessence of order and pioneer of justice, impartiality and good sense, the British bobby.

It appears as though this rare breed of caucasian men and women are possessed of some unique genetic trait, not to be found in their counterparts in other theatres of the world.

Even the most vulgar propaganda conceals some truth, and only with a dispassionate, historical inspection can the truth about the British police be extricated from the fulsome praises of those whose sole concern is the preservation of a bankrupt and repressive social order.

Summed up briefly, the truth about the British police reads as follows: The mass of the British people, in the process of overthrowing a tyrannical monarchy, has grown alert to the spectre of tyranny. Faced with the greed of the rising bourgeoisie, they have managed, through the centuries, to fight off, successfully, all attempts by a class of would-be tyrants to reassert the brutalities of the preceding age. Though the power swung this way now and that way then, the British public has managed to evolve a modern state which contains some of the

checks and balances against outright, totalitarian dictatorship.

In this remarkable balance struck between two classes, the police and armed forces have always remained subordinate to the civil power, hemmed in, as it were, by sets of rules and disciplines. In short, organisational structures tend to reflect that the police are servants of the public and answerable to us.

Time and again, the British police, straining at the leash by which they have



been held by the public, have sought to break away, shielded, egged on and encouraged by large sections of the bourgeoisie. Firmly they have been returned to what that fine historian, E.P. Thompson, describes as "something like a proper place."

The British bobby, therefore, has not been a creature endowed with fine genetic traits, but more a consequence of the partially successful struggles of a people and at times of a class, the working class, to put a firm grip on the tyrannical excesses to which all modern police forces are subject.

The British working class has always been central to this process. For the modern police force was indeed created for the specific purpose of preventing dock workers from augmenting their wages by appropriating a portion of the goods they were employed to load, unload and distribute. Some fifty thousand men and women, a powerful section of the growing industrial army of labour, was concentrated in the part of London there to handle the main commodity, sugar, the product of slave labour in the Caribbean.

The first modern police force was set up in Wapping in 1798 and financed largely by the West India merchants. The sons of merchants were not the ones employed to police the blood stained wealth of their parents. They, the merchants, would draw the personnel from within the working class itself.

This remains the principle of modern policing and the working class, from that





Photo on left: Peter Marlow

Photo bottom of p.8, John Sturrock, Report

moment has struggled to curb and sometimes to abolish the principal source of its oppression, the police.

Such a struggle found itself on the agenda in the political life of the nation in the mid 1950's. We need catalogue only a few examples which illustrate the rot that set in within the police force at the time.

In 1956, disciplinary action was taken against the then Chief Constable of Cardiganshire following complaints that his force was not properly administered.

In 1957, criminal proceedings were undertaken against the Chief Constable of Brighton and other senior officers. The Chief Constable was acquitted but subsequently dismissed from the force. Two senior police officers were found guilty of corruption and sentenced to imprisonment. Shortly after, the Chief Constable of Worcester was convicted of fraud and sentenced to imprisonment.

At the end of 1957, allegations were made that a young man from Thurso in Scotland was assaulted by two police officers and no effective action had been taken to investigate the truth of the complaint. A parliamentary tribunal found one of the officers guilty of an unjustifiable assault.

In July 1959, Nottingham Watch Committee suspended the Chief Constable who refused to submit a report of police enquiries, which concerned a member of the City Council. The Home Secretary intervened to reinstate the Chief Constable.

In November 1959, it was raised in Parliament that the Home Secretary made

£300 of public money available to settle an action brought against a constable of the Metropolitan police on grounds of alleged assault.

COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

And so, there was irrefutable evidence before the nation that sections of its police force, ranging from Chief Constable to the most lowly placed officer, were involved in a frolic of violence and corruption, all their own. The British people, on the other hand, had emerged from the Second World War with the sharpest of experiences of just what were the consequences of a police force gone berserk. With unbridled power vested in them, the corrupt German police had left, strewn across the continent, the bodies of thousands of European citizens. In this post Second World War atmosphere, the British working class were displaying a sense of self, a confidence in its own power which drew a grudging respect from its ruling classes. These forces combined to demand of their rulers that a severe check be placed on developments in the police force.

They succeeded in forcing the Conservative government of the day in setting up a Royal Commission on the police. Part of the brief of that Commission was an investigation into the relationship between the police and members of the public and the means of ensuring that complaints by the public against the police were effectively dealt with.

Grievances which simmered beneath the surface were brought out into the open. A veritable deluge of complaints poured into the Commission. Evidence given to the Commission raised the lid on police corruption. The Conservative Party Bow Group referred to offences of perjury committed by police officers to secure convictions against prisoners; the Law Society emphasised the tendency among police officers to colour and exaggerate evidence; the National Council for Civil Liberties drew attention to police violence, the irregular means of obtaining evidence, the ineptitude in handling processions and in dealing with political and industrial demonstrations.

The Police Federation and Superintendents Association admitted that relations between police and public had grown slightly worse. The Scottish Police Federation, the Magistrates Association of England and Wales and members of the legal profession registered that relations were in grave decline.

And the members of the Commission were forced to conclude that there was an overwhelming and disturbing body of evidence which pointed to police malpractice.

Even so, not one single incident involving blacks was recorded in those cases which forced the government to set up the Commission. More than that, there was not one statement from those entrusted with the tasks of the enquiry



Photo: Linda Westmore

which drew attention to what the police were up to in the black communities.

The only hint to emerge from within official society that police malpractice was not reserved for whites only came from the member of parliament for Salford West. In the Parliamentary debate, which addressed itself to the terms of reference of the Royal Commission, he asked the then Home Secretary whether 'the terms of reference would cover the relationship between the police and particularly coloured immigrants'.

This blanket silence on the particular experiences of blacks at the hands of the British police, at a moment when the issue was being openly debated, could only serve to reinforce in police officers that their malpractices in the domestic colonies had the sanction of official society and the public at large. In short, the findings of the Commission would strengthen the leash by which the white population held the police at bay, but freedom to go 'nigger hunting' was assured.

And now, it has to be said, that for twenty-five long years, right here on native soil, the British police have broken free from that leash, and like a horse deranged, trampled wildly through the black communities. In these domestic colonies, no rules apply, disciplines are broken willy nilly. The British bobby has given way to the boot boy, to the teddy boy in blue.

NIGGER HUNTING IN THE 50's

The West Indian Standing Conference, an umbrella body which coordinated the activities of a diverse number of small West Indian societies in the UK, wisely recorded for posterity the oppression of the period. The author of a report on the issue, commissioned by Standing Con-

ference, begins with the boldest of statements:

"For the seven years that I have been residing in Brixton, I have been constantly besieged by members of the immigrant population with matters of conflict between them and members of the Police Force."

The whole tenor of the report indicates that the author chose his words with a degree of caution. Not 'approached' by members of the immigrant population; not 'lobbied' by members of the immigrant population but 'besieged'. And besiege him the blacks did.

Somehow, the West Indian's home was not his castle as was the Englishman's. Nor did it seem that the proverbial right of a citizen of the UK to be secure in his dwelling house applied to blacks. Simulate, if you wish, the atmosphere at the Brixton or Notting Hill police station on any weekend during the mid-fifties.

The police patrol is on the alert for the Blue Beat: Should the sound of Prince Buster perhaps drift his way, then all powers of detection were set in motion. A posse of officers would be mobilised to apprehend these criminal subversives who were undermining the fabric of British society.

It was presumed that these perpetrators of the Blue Beat were perforce the vendors of both alcohol and ganga. And in charged the British bobby.

In these matters, the general tendency usually surfaces to the outsider in the form of celebrated cases. At a house in Mostyn Road, Brixton, in the year of our Lord 1962, a West Indian family invited guests to a party at their home. On information received, police officers at the Brixton police station were led to believe

that alcohol was being sold at the premises without a licence. In the name of the law the police violated the threshold of a black home, seized the drinks and charged the head of the household accordingly. The defendants were able to convince the magistrate that a quiet family celebration was simply desecrated by the pioneer of justice, impartiality and good sense, the British bobby.

Then too we had that cause celebre, 'the Wedding Cake' case. Again, Prince Buster activated the forces of law and order. They invaded the home and to the surprise of the West Indians present seized, also, several gaily wrapped parcels. It took several court hearings of prosecution and defence evidence for the magistrate to realise that the gaily wrapped parcels, the iced three-tiered cake did not 'fall off the back of a lorry' and that the drinks were in fact freely available for celebrating the union of man and wife.

BLACKS, SEX AND DOPE

There is ample evidence that these attacks were orchestrated from above. Sensing the growing criticisms developing within the black community the police, a force onto itself, had prepared politician and public alike for the crusade they were conducting in the domestic colony.

By 1957, a newspaper headline screamed, 'Black Men, Brothel Keeping and Dope', and called for 'a tighter supervision on the rash of clubs emerging in the West Indian community'. In February of that same year, following a raid on a house where black men were found to be playing cards, the Chief Inspector gave the following interview to the press:

"When the police find a house of this description every endeavour must be made to suppress it. The majority of men are not working. Many have never worked while they have lived in this country and have money from various means."

This view of the black population as engaging in weekend bacchanalian orgies where alcohol, sex and dope prevailed was well nurtured by the police. It served effectively to cut off and undermine the possibility of opposition from sections of the white population who would otherwise offer support to the black community. But the politicians had given their stamp of approval and expressed their confidence that the police were rightly engaged in stamping out perfidious tendencies which were emerging in the black community.

Why else did he address the following memorandum to all Chief Constables in March of 1957?

1. What is the number of coloured people in your area.
 - a. West Indians and b. Non West Indians?
2. Is there any definite evidence of large scale crime?
3. Do they mix well with white people?
4. What are the facts of illegitimacy related to West Indians?
5. What is the evidence concerning brothel management and coloured people?
6. What are the conditions under which they live?

This notion of blacks as loose in morals informed the Home Secretary's memorandum. It is not difficult to imagine the howls of protest from all quarters should the police be detailed to investigate the white population in this way. Cries of 'Totalitarian State' would be heard from almost every quarter should the Chief Constable of Worcester, who was, at the time, busily engaged in fraud, be asked to investigate illegitimacy of white factory workers in his constituency.

Nothing in our view could so guarantee continued police malpractice within the black community as the carte blanche given to officers to investigate the six points outlined by the Home Secretary. Do they dare tell us that scores of police constables, with clapper board at hand, were mobilised to make discreet door to door surveys at West Indian occupied homes?

Quite the opposite actually took place. It was in this atmosphere that the term 'nigger hunting' was coined. Listen to the report prepared by the West Indian Standing Conference:

"It has been confirmed that sergeants and constables do leave stations with the express purpose of going 'nigger hunting', that is to say, they do not get orders to act in this way, but among themselves they decide to bring in a coloured person at all cost."

Standing Conference, comprised of men and women brought up on a diet of British democracy as the ideal system, could be excused for their naivete. It was beyond them at the time to grasp that a British Home Secretary would sanction 'nigger hunting'.

The report goes on to describe the modus operandi:

"The difficulty to apprehend the policemen who indulge in these hunts, lies in the fact that most of them go



out in plain clothes, they use their own cars and in many instances, persons who are threatened or assaulted cannot get their numbers. Even when a coloured man attempts to take a policeman's number he is apprehended for obstruction."

The black suspect must have lived in a constant state of bewilderment at the line of questioning employed by officers at police stations.

"How many rooms are there in your house?"

"Who sleeps where?"

"Have you got a separate kitchen and bath?"

"Are your children legitimate?"

"Does the woman in the flat above have many male visitors?"

"Do you say good morning to Mr and Mrs Smith who live next door?"

"Why not?"

The arrogance, the sheer confidence with which officers framed blacks and executed physical brutality were drawn from the unbridled power derived from the Home Office and the media which fawned over every comment from the police.

It is this image of crime and vice which provoked the broadening of the crusade to involve white citizens in physical attacks on blacks.

In October 1958, the Home Secretary proclaimed to the nation, about the Notting Hill Race Riots, that, "difficulties arose partly through vice."

Armed with that statement, 'nigger hunting' as a police practice was signed, sealed and delivered. To this day neither the Home Office nor the police have advanced any evidence that the black

population was ever to any substantial degree involved in large scale vice activity. And where these small clubs emerged, it was due to the failure of those who ruled and governed to sanction and appreciate the self creativity of the black population in generating institutions of their own.

It was in the course of these weekend engagements that the British policeman was himself transformed. From Bobby to Babylon.

BLACK RESISTANCE

Only the most dyed-in-the-wool racist would not foresee that the black working class in Britain, like its white counterpart, would embark on a struggle aimed at returning the British police to its proper place; aimed at driving the British police from the threshold of the black home; aimed at establishing the West Indian's home as his castle.

Two elements served as constraints on the West Indian community. Firstly, our very presence in Britain was as a result of the defeat of the Caribbean working class in the pre and post Second World War anti-colonial insurrection. The defeated and demoralised must necessarily experience a period of caution before traditions of resistance and rebellion are rekindled. And secondly, we were constrained by the fact that we were a minority and could not guarantee what whites would do in any serious confrontation with the police. White attitudes ranged then from the crude racism, popular among large sections of the white working classes, to a finely honed racialism of the white and liberal left which blamed all on our persistent adherence to strange, cultural practices, and a failure to integrate into the mainstream of the British way of life.

The West Indian population did not, however, come alive in Britain. Centuries of struggles — riots, strikes, insurrections, social campaigns — helped to shape a population, which had experienced a brutal slave and colonial past.

We had, immediately prior to mass immigration into Britain, fought bitter struggles against the colonial office to establish an organised labour movement. Independent trade unions, in many cases accompanied by political parties of organised labour, proliferated in almost every Caribbean territory. Where the local police and militia were unable to cope, the armed might of the British army and navy threatened. And we were well versed in the struggle against police brutality and corruption. The author well remembers the oft quoted incident involving a Trinidadian police officer, Charlie King. He was much hated by the Trinidadian oil workers for his brutal exercise of colonial power. In the heat of an oil strike he was cornered by striking oil workers, given a petrol bath and set on fire.

It would take much more than the British police to reduce such a population into a weeping, whimpering mass of defenceless workers.

Even with constraints we have described, the police were able to detect elements of resistance and opposition. Chief Superintendent J.R. Norman, based at Scotland Yard, expressed the view that the police were becoming indignant because of constant challenges being made on them by West Indians. Norman continued that this phenomenon was a strange feature, for whereas a white man would humbly acquiesce to an order of a police officer, the West Indian would question.

With the attitude and practice prevailing, such currents as existed in the black community would necessarily find organisational form and expression. In September 1958, the Coloured Peoples Progressive Organisation emerged under the leadership of Frances Ezzreco and George David. They demanded, at once, that "action should be taken against any police discrimination". The Committee for African Organisation protested to Prime Minister McMillan that "coloured citizens in the UK have lost confidence in the ability of law enforcement agencies to protect them."

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Nor was the resistance solely confined to the police. For the first time blacks in Britain would be educated en masse about the much touted fearless independence of the British judiciary. A British lawyer has told us, in conversation, that

he was being literally bombarded, week after week, with cases arising from the weekend raids on house parties. He admits his training guided him to advise his clients to plead guilty in those cases where the evidence, on the face of it, appeared to lead to a conviction. His seniors drilled into him the pact which exists between the practitioner and the court, to reduce to a minimum the numbers of contested cases. Whenever he approached his West Indian clients, they, in most cases, vehemently refused. "Whatever the price I have to pay, I am pleading not guilty, go in there and defend me," they would say. And he did. There were others, referred to in the black community as police lawyers, in whose way the police pushed cases. In return for favours granted they would collude with police officers in securing their own client's conviction.

Invariably, the magistrates would rubber stamp police evidence, but the rebellious spirit of the black community could not be suppressed. Later blacks were to organise groups of lawyers who would be on call for 24 hours and, of the greatest importance, who would follow client's instructions to the letter. 'Defence' was set up in Notting Hill with the assistance of the celebrated author, Colin McInnes. Then the West Indian Standing Conference set up a panel of lawyers for similar purposes.

It may be of some surprise to those who are presently engaged in the current campaign to abolish the 'curfew law' that 'nigger hunters' of the mid and late 19th century had resurrected, from the cobwebs of legal antiquity, the vague and nebulous accusation of 'loitering with intent.' The charge became the stock-in-trade of police officers in North London, Notting Hill and Brixton.

POLICE CORRUPTION

There is, in circumstances of oppression, never a clear and clean line between those who rebel and those who don't. Avenues are always created by the victims through which direct confrontation or principled resistance are avoided. Sections of the West Indian population sought coldly and deliberately to draw police officers into a cesspool of corruption. Owners of illegal clubs, popularly called 'shebeens' and gaming houses, were a source of 'earnings' for police officers. The swift exchange of pound notes provided insurance against constant raids and harassment. The pimp, the gambler, the illegal alcohol vendor had encircled police officers in a web of corruption.

And the police denied it all. Whatever difficulties there were stemmed from a

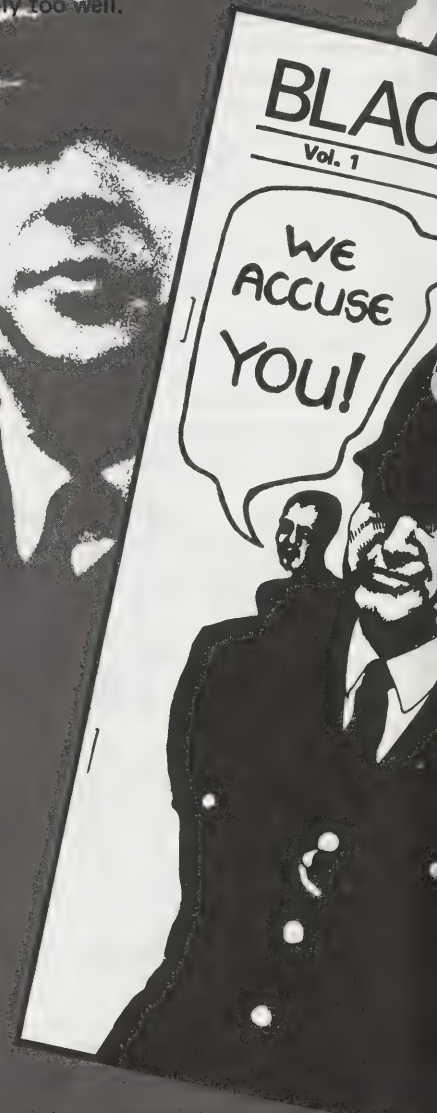
lack of understanding of modern police procedures on the part of the new immigrants. The Brixton Police offered the West Indian Standing Conference the following explanation for the deteriorating relations between blacks and the police.

The new Lambethans have found themselves entangled in the complexity of a highly industrialised society."

No doubt these new blacks had to be lured from the dark recesses of jungle law. And what finer escorts can be afforded them but the pioneer of justice, the paragon of virtue, the British bobby?

Nothing could be further from the truth. Caribbean peoples, like their British counterparts, were saddled with modern policing from time. Like our British counterparts, we have had to struggle to keep West Indian policemen in their proper place, sometimes with a violence equal in intensity to anything that obtained in the British Isles.

The Brixton police were fortunate that the new Lambethans did not revive some of our traditions on the streets of Brixton. We understood modern policing only too well.



On 10 May 1964, a young black student Challenor demonstrated what was then politics in a highly industrialised society was all about. He was stationed at the West End Central Police Station. Vigorous counsel had disposed of him as having planted a nail-brick on (one of the demonstrators at a rally mobilised to protest political events in Greece).

There then followed a procession of defendants who had to be pardoned, some released from custody on frame-ups which ranged from the planting of a jemmy, detonator caps, cigarette lighters, offensive weapons, half bricks, all in an orgy of fabricated evidence. The famous line to emerge from that whole investigation was coined by Challenor as he vigorously pursued his enquiries in relation to a black suspect. With folded fist, he unleashed a barrage of punches at the suspect, all the while singing the following refrain:

'Bongo, Bongo
Go back to the jungle'.

Challenor, should justice prevail, would have served a long stretch at Her Majesty's Pleasure. It would have meant a vindication of all the protests raised

by the black population. It would have undermined the single propaganda asserted about the British bobby. It would have revealed that right here in the heart of the capital, under the noses of senior police officers, the most dominant police corruption prevailed.

Official society had to find a way out of this embarrassment, organise a cover-up, if you like. Junior officers were imprisoned and, on September 16th, 1963, Detective Sergeant Challenor was suddenly declared medically unfit for duty and seven weeks later certified a paranoid schizophrenic. Only a mad man, they seemed to be saying, could or would behave in such a way. Challenor was, within months, declared sane, eventually to be offered a comfortable sinecure in the growing industry of private security — the final resting place for corrupt officers.

Henceforth, we were treated to a remarkable juggling act. The clowns at the Home Office, the jugglers who ran our police forces up and down the country coined the rotten apple theory for the single corrupt officer. No longer the platitudes about immigrants entangled in a highly industrialised society but the one rotten apple in a barrel of the finest Cox's.

UP AGAINST THE LAW

Urgent though the issues were, the black population faced formidable opposition in wringing any fundamental concession from the British establishment. We were up against the persistent myth of the British bobby; a police force which pushed its propaganda to the white population through an accommodating media, a government which demanded that the black population, as new immigrants, be whipped into shape in order to facilitate the accumulation of international capital; a legal system which, for centuries, had paraded its impartiality before the world; a political left which insisted that, though things were slightly amiss, it was our fault that we did not integrate; the hostility of the white working classes, now driven into frenzied attacks on their black brothers and sisters as competition for the crumbs of capitalism intensified.

By the mid sixties, some crumbs were thrown our way. The Police Act 1964 included some of the recommendations made by the 1961 — 1962 Commission of Enquiry. We were propagandised that the most far reaching revolutionary concept was now enshrined in law. Section 49 (1) states:

"Where the chief officer of police for any area receives a complaint

from a member of the public against a member of the police force for that area he shall (unless the complaint alleges an offence with which the member of the police force has been charged) forth with record the complaint and cause it to be investigated and for that purpose may and shall if directed by the Secretary of State, request the chief officer of police for any other police to provide an officer of the police force for that area to carry out an investigation."

Also, in January 1964, Lord Chief Justice Parker established a set of rules, the Judges Rules, which offered safeguards to suspects held at police stations.

Having satisfied itself that the leash on the police was strengthened, official society relaxed in a glow of self-satisfaction.

Stalemate. Nothing was resolved as we entered the latter half of the 1960's. Police officer investigated police officer and with monotonous regularity the notice was returned, 'no grounds for taking any action.' At the slightest criticism, officers would wave the complaints system as a foolproof source of fairness. The system was tested by blacks from John O'Groats to Lands End only to be told quite recently by a Chief Constable that the complaints system is being abused by trouble makers.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Something had to give after years of trying to convince those in authority that the issue of police malpractice was the single, most important source of oppression under which blacks were being kept at heel. In the summer of 1968, the BBC at last took a decision to air the issue on the television screen. The programme was titled 'Cause for Concern'. It was a diligent piece of journalism, well researched and one which brought to the attention of the public, in carefully documented cases, examples of how police operated in the black communities.

The viewing public heard from a schoolteacher that he and his friend, a barrister, had been planted with car keys and charged with attempting to steal a motor car. They were found not guilty and a sum of £8000 damages was awarded against the Metropolitan police. We were treated to another case of a young black worker who was arrested on a 'sus' charge. The defendant could provide evidence that he was at work when the police claimed that they were observing him dipping into handbags with intent to steal. There

DIMENSION

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were a few more fine treats but none greater than the ex police officer who told all. No need to paraphrase him. Here it is, just as he told it:

Ex-Policeman:

Well I think in the police force you find a complex of prejudiced minorities. For example you might find that a certain number of police officers would be prejudiced against taxi drivers, bus drivers or against Jewish people. But I think that coloured prejudice is virtually absolute. In other words it extends to probably 99%.

Interviewer:

What efforts were made by senior officers to counteract it?

Ex-Policeman:

None at all that were apparent. Either they were unaware that it exists or they just choose to ignore it.

Interviewer:

Amongst yourselves when you talked about coloured people — what was the general attitude?

Ex-Policeman:

I suppose one of looking on them as inferior people.

Interviewer:

What sort of pressures are there on a policeman if he wants to do well at the job?

Ex-Policeman:

Well there is this sort of hardman cult which exists among the lower ranks and this required a young man to prove himself in many ways. Mainly it requires him to prove himself by the number of arrests he makes.

Interviewer:

What about this in relation to coloured people. Are they more vulnerable?

Ex-Policeman:

The old tradition would be that the coloured man is not as fully aware of his rights as a white man

would be and on this assumption I suppose he would be more vulnerable.

Interviewer:

How did you feel about it?

Ex-Policeman:

Well it's very difficult to preserve any individual views that one might have had at the outset. It's uh you get carried along with the tide. Very difficult.

Interviewer:

Did you ever feel like objecting?

Ex-Policeman:

Well naturally one feels like objecting; I don't know; I can't speak for everyone, but I felt like objecting on a few occasions, but it would have been out of the question. I would have been socially unacceptable within the police force.

There you have it. For the first time we were able to force a break in police ranks, there for the nation to discover just how and why police officers operated in the domestic colonies of Britain. It would not have been beyond the bounds of reason for politicians, press and police, suitably chastened by this revelation, to involve themselves even momentarily in a public display of self criticism. After which we would be offered a string of policies geared to put their house in order.

That would have been a dream at worst and political naivete at best. State institutions never demonstrate humility unless confronted with the full might of peoples power. No revelations, however scandalous, would alter that fact.

The police, having been granted (perhaps out of courtesy) a preview of the television programme, launched a virulent counter offensive. Robert Mark, then Assistant Commissioner of the

Metropolitan Police describes their attitude at the time:

"(The film) must have been one of the most inaccurate and distorted films ever to find its way on a BBC screen."

Mark confirms that his Commissioner objected to the film and bullied the BBC into banning it. In a carefully contrived operation the police immediately swooped on the home of Black Power activist, Obi Egbuna, and arrested him. The charge? Uttering and writing threatening to kill police officers at Hyde Park. Mission accomplished, the Commissioner of Police relaxes on an interview on the opposite channel and tells the nation that he has saved their lily white police from the conspirational evil of a raging, black power fanatic. He made the one mistake, silly man, by mentioning, on the competing channel, the fact that the BBC programme was banned. That fact supported by a militant picket at

the BBC studios at Lime Grove, embarrassed the BBC into giving Cause for Concern prime viewing time.

The black community was now strengthened by a major victory. The white population now educated by the film would have to take up position. They could no longer plead ignorance.

We were left in no doubt that the police would not give an inch. The Met set their public relations team in motion. A series of articles followed in the 'Sunday Mirror' in which they sought to convey an atmosphere of excellent relations between police officers and the black community. Notting Hill was chosen as the terrain and a PC Pulley was announced as the archetypal British bobby who cared for and loved his constituents. Every racist police practice was now publicly condoned.

The issue, henceforth, would no longer be conducted in privacy between the contending forces. It would now occupy the centre of the national stage and has remained there to this day.

GROUNDINGS FROM GUYANA

The following are statements taken from a tape recorded seminar organised by the Working Peoples Alliance at Annandale, on the East Coast of Guyana, in January 1980. The participants are housewives, workers and WPA activists who speak directly to people in Britain about what they face in Guyana.

This seminar was held just after Kwame Apata, one of the Referendum 5, was sentenced by a magistrate to one year's imprisonment for possession of a firearm and eight rounds of ammunition.

Since then, a new Criminal Law Bill has been rushed through Parliament, provoking a wide range of protests in the society. The Bar Council organised a successful boycott of the courts.

Through this bill, the Burnham regime has withdrawn certain cases from the verdict of the only sections of Guyanese society over which his party cannot guarantee total control, Judge and Jury. The bill allows serious offences, referred to in legal jargon as indictable cases, to be heard before a magistrate — usually a party hack, supporter or sympathiser.

The effect of this law was unprecedentedly, made retroactive in order that it should apply to the case of Kwame Apata, an activist in the Working Peoples Alliance. Apata was charged with the possession of a firearm and ammunition. He was refused trial by jury and the presiding magistrate found him guilty and sentenced him to one year's imprisonment. Apata appealed on the point that he was wrongly denied a trial by jury and the Court of Appeal found in his favour.

Finally, the governments plans to settle refugees from South East Asia and Dominica have also met with widespread opposition within Guyana. The government will receive some \$6 million, and intends to resettle the refugees in a specific area. Similarities with Jonestown are made by the Working Peoples Alliance, since the resettlement body, the Christian Refugee Team International will have overall authority.



Sister Ruby Ganishdeen: Good afternoon brothers and sisters in England. I rejoice to know that our struggle is not confined to us only, but that our brothers and sisters in your area are thinking about us and are struggling with us to remove this oppressive government that has driven us to a point of great frustration. Words are inadequate for me to tell you of our great struggle, but I am certain that from reading and other communications you are informed. We housewives, still have to be queuing up and still have to make relationships that are not comely to get certain essential items. Those of us who are parents find it extremely difficult to support our families. Because of this we join in the struggle to eliminate the oppression and starvation that persists in our community. When we do this we are dismissed from our jobs and told that it is in public interest. If you follow the dictates of your conscience, or are realistic about what the regime has in store for you, you are dismissed in the public interest. I have been one of the unfortunate ones who have been dismissed in the public interest after almost twenty-one years of service at Georgetown hospital. I am left to support, with the assistance of my husband, nine children. But I do not mind because I know I am struggling for the generation of which my children are a part. We are determined to fight and not to cease fighting. We know that the day will come when the dark clouds that are hanging overhead will be removed, and the silver lining will present itself and we shall over-come. Again, I say that you for being with us, and we hope that the time is not far distant when many of

Vigil for Arnold Rampersaud

you will be able to come to see what we have been working towards and what we have achieved.

Sister A: Well girls, I went to the shop and they were only giving 4lbs of flour and a pound tub of margaine. I joined the line, but eventually I had to come out because they were people going at the back of the store who had friends at Jaikaran. The sun was bleaching me and I might have fainted.

Sister B: I been to the shop. I buy from the shop every month, say \$200 in goods, or how much I can afford. Now, he tell me, the first day we go, come back on Saturday you gwine get butter, you gwine get flour. But I ain have no flour in the house and you know every morning and afternoon time I like fo eat me roti. So Saturday come, ah go back, because the last pound of flour left in the house, and one pound a flour na even make roti for six people. Ah go morning, she say come back in the afternoon, go back afternoon, 'no flour na come yet'. We have fe wait, she say. 'Come back next week, ah expect

anytime, you must check me during the week.' Is everyday from then – Saturday night, Monday Tuesday. Every day you go, none, no flour, no flour. I say, alright, ah go buy a tin ah biscuits because you can't get flour, you na get bread, you na get roti, nothing. So ah go to buy the biscuits, no biscuits na dey. So me who don't like fo eat rice, whu me must eat? Child, tell me whu me must do?

Sister A: But the thing is why you didn't take the flour money and go by them different shops? Is only that you have fo line up a little, but you could line up by John, you could ha line up by GMC in the market, you could ha line up by Complex, up by Milan and you would ha get good two, two pounds.

Sister B: Right, well hear na, me gwine line up, but whu me gwin get fo buy the ting with because ah miss work right. So if I should take time off from my job fo go and line up, at the end of the month, you see ya pay sheet come in, no money because you not going to work, ya can't get money.

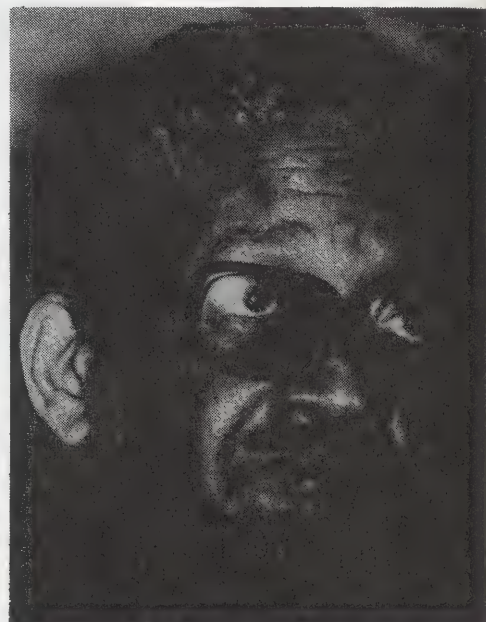
Sister A: But lining up don't always pay because everybody got dey friend. So, is all about people go and use the back door to get their things.

Sister B: Da is another story altogether.

Sister C: Well you ain know no friend wha dey in any PNC group who can recommend you? Da does work acceptably. You ain know nobody?

Sister B: Me ain know nobody so whu me gwine do.

Sister C: Well look, you had better get to know, if not, we got a shopkeeper in the village. You never hear about Mr Abrahams he is a PNC man and he gets all the items you want. All yo got to do is go



and buy there, and you will get, he gwine give you, thats one thing about him. If you go he will give you, even if its a half pound, a two pound and so on. But you don't have to identify yourself as any active member of any party.

Sister B: But is how much you have to pay for it?

Sister C: Well he don't sell all black market, but I could send you at other shops where you could get flour.

Sister B: But you have to pay the black market.

Sister C: Yes, but you will get it.

Sister B: Tell me something, when you go there, they say you can't buy flour alone or garlic, you have to buy soap, you

have to buy butter, you have to buy curry powder, before you can get a tin of milk or a pound of butter or a half pound of garlic. Isn't that so?

Sister C: Well, in some of the shops. Ah don't know for he (Abrahams). But ah know the other shops. But wha you got to do is, if you get ten dollars to buy, divide up the money and buy a tin of milk and two ounces of flour here and go buy another half pound somewhere else. Divide the money and go to the different shops.

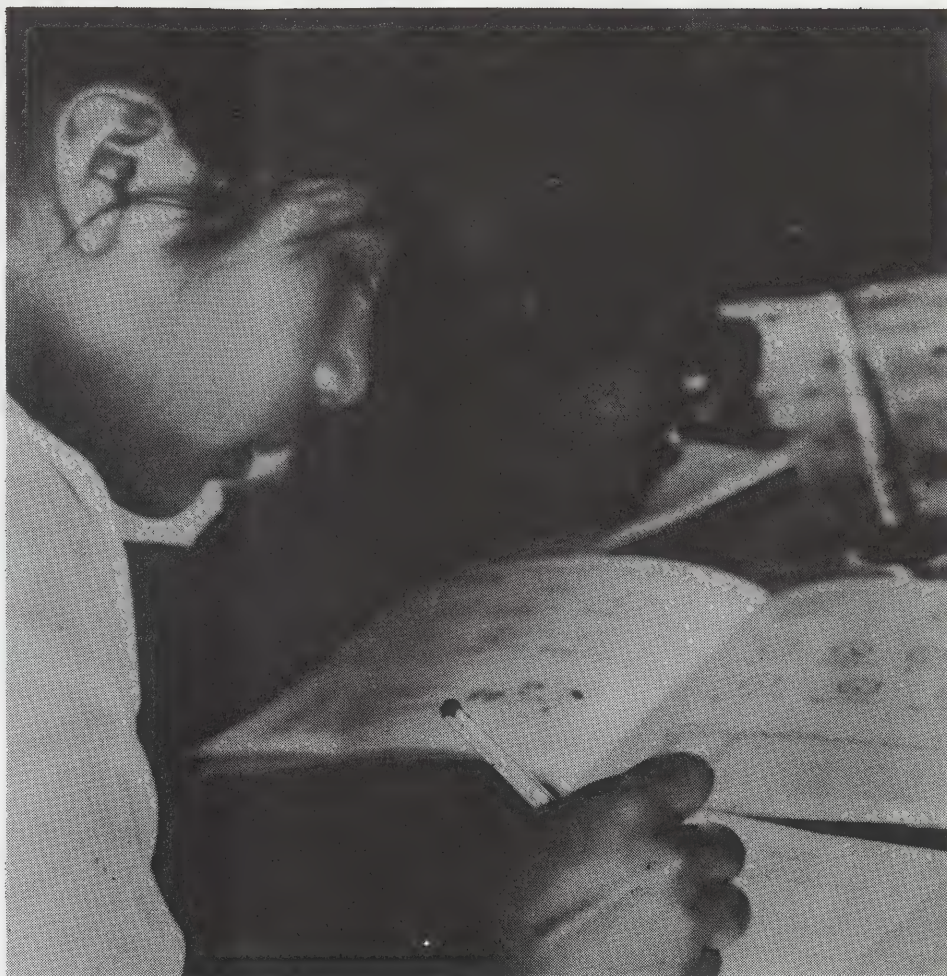
Sister B: Ah can't stand the situation any longer I just going to go and join the WPA to overthrow this regime. I can't stand it.

Sister C: You can't join WPA. You know what gwine happen? You see that they lock up the brother the other day there. You can't join WPA right away now. Because if they see you, they got PNC thugs that pointing you out. You didn't hear the story about the Brother at Buxton He went at the Complex got his things and before he could cash his bill, a PNC thug pointed him out. They pull him out and gave him a good licking, for going there to buy, and he is a WPA supporter. You had better be careful how you going, it is the right thing to do but don't go too quickly now, wait until you get flour and sugar.

Sister B: Christmas? Well, don't talk about Christmas. Since October we waiting for gas to cook with, up to now. Is when we get Christmas? We get Christmas in January.

Sister C: Well, I ain't burning gas since the Prime Minister say cut down on gas, and he making stove wha can burn with wood and coals. I burning wood and coconut shell. But I mean ah can't get help from the children, because they nose running and everything. They complaining about they eye and everything. With regards to electricity, the light bill sky-rocketting. Ah burning lamp and candle for the children study.

Sister B: Well ma children does absent from school every afternoon. Miss have to give them absent. Miss soon have to go line up for kerosene oil. Well, Miss, you know the story now, when you have other thing to do, you have to go and hustle for a living and especially now I ain have a source coming in, no means of support. The children have to line up while you hustle somewhere else to get the money to get the bread.



Sister A: Well the children losing because school don't wait on them.

Sister C: Well as far as I am concerned, Miss, the children have been losing ever since, and the government helping them to lose more, because they going to school for 8.30 and they say they sending buses. Some of them don't get to school until 10.30. That mean the morning is finished. When they get to school at 10.00, they don't bother to go to school because they might as well finish the morning roaming. They ain't got books. You all say you giving them exercise books. Ah had to go at the shop. The boy ask me how it is you buying a dozen exercise books and government giving free exercise books? Since September, my daughter got eight exercise books at the Multi-Lateral. My son got, I think a dozen at the secondary and the other three at Central. Is only this opening of school here, the one girl got four, and the other two got two each. All the time I have been buying exercise books by the dozen and my daughter, at the Multi-Lateral, she needs twenty exercise books for the twenty subjects, and she only got eight. The government already depriving them of education.

Sister B: Well, you see they say that you only get some of the exercise books, we can't get all. Well you going to get some later, I don't know when, must be when school open next term.

Sister C: Then what about text books. That another thing. They say they giving the essential books. My boy from secondary didn't get any books because the teacher say I must go and sign and if he loses any, I going to have to pay. Well I am one mother who ain able to go and sign, and then when the book finish he ain got them to go back on and read. They ain't getting enough to eat to get proper brain. Their grey matter ain functioning properly. So I would like to know I had to go and buy Bykin Book 1, Bykin Book 3. The teacher told me, my son, he goan pay most three dollars. Ah paid seven dollars and some cents for Bykin Book 3 and I have a long list. I just buy another book for my eight year old. As far as I am concerned the government got the teachers there, they ain't have much to do. So because the children ain have books to study, they got to play all day. Now they playing all day to celebrate the Prime minister's birthday and all of that. So the children might as well queue up and get essentials to eat and get strong.

Eusi Kwayana elder of ASCRIA and founding member of the Working Peoples Alliance.

In England you live among other Caribbean people, you live among Asians, you live among Africans and you live among the British people themselves. We are simply asking you, at your workplaces or where ever you are, to become ambassadors of the revolution in Guyana. To let people know exactly what your sisters and brothers at home are suffering and what they are faced with.

We know, that in the United Kingdom where you live, conditions are not easy. You have to battle against various forces, you have to work hard in order to exist. Many of us in Guyana would like to work but cannot obtain a job or will lose a job because of political beliefs or because of political activity. Please lift your voices high, refuse to be deceived, bring all the pressure that you can on the government in Guyana. Do not for one moment be trapped into thinking that there can be free and fair elections here, controlled by the PNC. The only type of election worth considering, in our view, is one where the election is conducted from the registration right on to the declaration of results by an outside authority, preferably from the United Nations or from the Human Rights organisations of the Caribbean. Anything else would be a repetition of previous riggings.

It is only fair to bring you up to date with the new constitution that will come into effect on February 23. No doubt, they are telling you, in England, a lot of beautiful things about this constitution, how it is a socialist constitution and how it will have more rights in it than the actual law allows. The first thing I want us to look at is the Constituent Assembly farce that is now ending. This Constituent Assembly was boycotted by all the opposition parties in Guyana. Several people were tempted by the PNC to go before it to put memoranda and give their views on the constitution. They wasted several months trying to advise the PNC and give it some ideas for good government. At the end of it all, the PNC put up a draft, and believe me this is the final constitution which is now being put to the illegal National Assembly. This farce of the Constituent Assembly was only a scheme to deceive the outside world that the new constitution was something put together by democratic means. People were simply used, people in various arms of the PNC, the TUC leader, like Polydore, and the Teachers Union head, Blair, who felt that they could somehow convince the PNC.

But they knew full well that what they were doing was a deliberate act of conspiring, along with the PNC, in order to

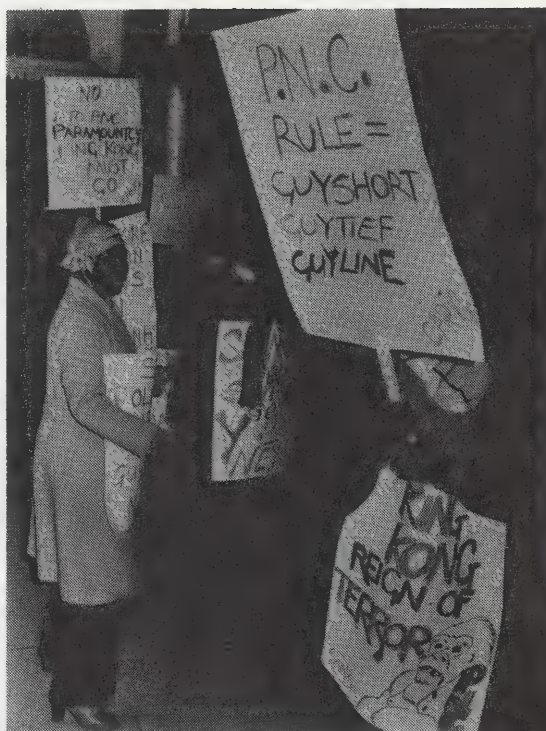


Photo on left: Picket in London

Photo below is of Eusi Kwayana, Elder of ASCRIA, and Executive member of the Working Peoples Alliance.

hoodwink the masses and to impose this new constitution on them. Now, this new constitution is simply an instrument that will make the present dictatorship constitutional. Burnham has been violating every single right in the constitution. Under the new constitution, he will be able to do it legally. The new constitution will come into effect after some provisional arrangements have been exercised. These provisional arrangements are not yet passed into law, but they give the Executive President, who is going to be Burnham, extraordinary powers. First of all, Prime Minister Burnham will hand over to President Burnham without an election. He will be Prime Minister today and, on the appointed day, which he will proclaim himself, he will become President Burnham, that is Executive President. He will then decide on an election date, and he will appoint the chairman of the election commission and run the election as Executive President.

Under the new constitution, don't forget, the Executive President is head of state, the supreme executive authority and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. So it would be totally impossible to get anything like a fair election under the new constitution. Even under the old constitution, where public authorities were entitled to some freedom, this will be denied them. But now, Burnham can legally give instructions to anyone, because he is the supreme, executive authority. The constitution allows him, without even consulting the leader of the opposition, to appoint the chairman of the election commission. So brothers and sisters we can forget the whole idea of free and fair elections.



What else is there about the constitution that makes it such a menacing document? It has a long list of freedoms in it - the right to this and the right to that - but before that, there are certain general principles which they state. One of these principles is that everyone has the duty to defend the country. This means that in this age of peace, we are going to be faced with possible conscription.

Under this provision, that every one has the duty to defend the country, the Burnham regime will make laws which will allow them to conscript right and left throughout the country. As for those who object to military service, they will have to do labour in place of it. This labour, in the place of military service, is indeed a part of the 1966 constitution, but this did not contain the duty to defend the country.

This new constitution also declared that everyone has the right to work and a duty to work. Those of us who live in Guyana know that no one has the right to work, and no one, after the February 23 will have any right to work unless Burnham wants you to have the right to work. So what is this new game about the right to work and the duty to

work? The economy is tottering, new industries have not been developed, we are still on the old colonial structures of sugar, bauxite and rice. All of these three industries have been under-producing. Construction is at a very low level, thousands and thousands of Guyanese production workers are now in Surinam work in under very bad conditions, because there simply is no work for them at present in Guyana. So how, under these present condition, with a massive foreign exchange deficit, with ministers running about the world looking for loans, the economy under-performing, all the targets of the IMF being missed, how is the government seriously going to offer people the right to work?

You can get a job as a spy, perhaps, in the massive espionage force which the regime has been building. You have the PNC intelligence, the army intelligence, the police intelligence, the GDF intelligence, you have the House of Israel and all of these various security forces serving the government. So, perhaps, if you want a job, you also have a duty to accept any job which the government gives you.

Let us take another case, ie. local government. This country has postponed local government elections about four times, since 1978. There were four elections due in local government councils, village and town councils and district councils, which have not been held because the PNC fears defeat. Now, there is a new constitution which looks us in the face and tells us that we have the right to elect local government bodies. We know that these bodies will be rigged along with the national assembly. But what is interesting here is that under the constitution, it says that local, democratic organs, that is district councils, shall have the power to organise the district for economic, political and cultural projects. What does that mean? It means, that under that declaration, laws can be made under which the local government authorities can regiment and push around people, politically, culturally and economically. In fact, they can achieve the same object of forced labour and forced participation in PNC activities, and all of this will become constitutional.

This is what we mean when we say that the PNC regime is setting up a constitutional dictatorship. They are using the principle of fundamental law under which the constitution is the fundamental law and can state general principles. Once those principles are approved by the illegal National Assembly, and the constitution becomes lawful, they can make repressive laws which will in fact be laws made under the constitution.



Omowale — member of the Working Peoples Alliance, one of the Referendum 5.

Greetings sisters and brothers. These greetings come at a time when the struggle here for the liberation of the people of Guyana reaches a new height every day. In fact, this message comes when our brother, Kwame Apata, one of the Referendum 5, is presently in prison awaiting a decision on an application for bail pending the appeal of his conviction. Sister Karen De Souza, another member of the Referendum 5, is due shortly to appear in court on the ridiculous charge of larceny of parts of a National Service kit, and the other three members of the Referendum 5, the Arson 3, are due to appear before the cowboy magistrate's court to answer the charges of burning down a building.

We feel that it is important for those of you who support us to understand the way in which we perceive this struggle, and the way in which the people of Guyana are fully supporting us. And therefore, we mention some of the incidents surrounding our arrests which would normally be regarded as personal, but which are, in effect, quite reflective of the situation. For example, as was mentioned earlier, we were arrested very early in the morning with an apparent diligence which is unknown for the police force in Guyana. It is clear that the arrests were attacks on the WPA, and this was substantiated, not so long afterwards, by the Prime Minister, who said he knew that it was the WPA who burnt his building and that he was judge and jury of that matter.

We were held for several days without charge. My own experience at the Beterverwagting police station lock up was, in fact, no more than the experiences of a large number of people in Guyana today who face the violence of the regime in one way or another. The condition in that place was abhorrent even to the police who had to do duty there. But the point I want to make is that I had to face cockroaches, bugs, urine and filth in a cell without light, without proper ventila-

tion, without proper facilities for a bath. This could never be taken as a personal attack because it is nothing more than the conditions which large sections of the population have to face. The police themselves are unhappy about the conditions under which they have to work. And this is another reason for the growing feeling in the community, including the brothers and sisters who are in the armed services, that conditions are unsatisfactory and that change is very necessary.

The preliminary hearings of our case, as you might have heard, were nothing more than another farce staged by the PNC in which the right to trial by jury, enshrined virtually in every democratic state in the world, was denied us on the accusation that it was not necessary. We were told that magistrates could effectively deal with our case. This has to be taken in context of the fact that the Prime Minister has already said that he knew who was guilty, the WPA, and that we were arrested because we were members of the WPA. This statement has to be seen in the light of the declaration of paramountcy of the party. Paramountcy over the judiciary has clearly been practiced. For example, any magistrate who failed to jail persons convicted of hoarding or blackmarketeering would have to explain to the Prime Minister why this was so. The fact that the flag of the party has flown over the Court of Appeal. The situation is particularly more alarming since a new Chancellor of the Judiciary has been sworn in. He has said that even at times like these, that the judiciary is independent in Guyana. One has to be even more alarmed that such public statements could be made apparently voluntarily.

It is clear that justice through the courts is now impossible, and one must struggle on the political front to mobilise people to recognise that these are avenues no longer available to them.

The repression in our society will bring its own reaction, and our experience is that in as much as the people of Guyana are resolved to struggle, the regime is creating more friends of the revolution, more participants in the revolution, creating more support for the forces that are fighting the dictatorship.

The resounding response to our public meeting is one indication of the peoples willingness to struggle against the regime. The fact that people have faced tear gas smoke, have faced the beatings of people who are dressed in police uniform, but people who are well known to be no more than thugs, the fact that people are prepared to face all this and continue to attend public meetings is another sign of the peoples' resolve.

CREATION

For Liberation

Out Of Orbit

New Planet — An Anthology of Modern Caribbean Writing compiled and edited by Sebastian Clarke.

Published by Third World Publications

Reviewed by Eden Charles

In a confused preface Sebastian Clarke, the editor of this anthology, advances the proposition that there exists a new tradition in Caribbean writing. It is characterised, he leads us to believe, by a rejection of European literary form and is the 'New Planet' of the title. Fortunately, not all the contributors to this anthology have adopted the same form as Clark, or learned to mask the meaning of their words with more words as successfully as he has. For example:

'The proposition is not that the orthodox English Language is antithetical to profoundest insight and culturally paradigmatic qualities, but the direction/uses (as manipulated language) of its focus.'

It was tortuous getting through the perface, but having done that, I discovered some real gems, and significantly, they are, with the exception of the piece by John La Rose, works that are not conscious reflections of a political position. The first work in the book, 'Signpost of the Phoenix' by Faustin Charles, is an eight and a half page short story. without a comma or full stop. Inventive and lively, its roots are in the language and culture of Carnival in Trinidad. It does not try to analyse or explain Carnival for the outsider with vivid literary pyrotechnics, nor does it seek to attach any political meaning to it. Yet, nowhere in this book is there a more evocative piece of writing or for that matter one so full of detail about, and implicit praise for, an aspect of contemporary Caribbean mass culture. Here he describes the preparation for the Carnival festival:

"... Ah sure dey goin to win either firs secon or tird prize dey really doing someting to everybody all a dem head high up like dey braver dan de sun an moon put together dat is de great work of many months an years an some nights widout sleep an you wake up planning an tinkin an re-tinkin an replanning an den de paint-

ing bending building reworkin wire-bendin redoin an undoing hammerin out copper tin steel cardboard wood an stone an brass an silver seein an reseein silver an steel singin and dancin yellow brown red fringin inside an outside de peacock feather. . ."

This is a monologue that, for all its vitality on the written page, demands to be read out loud by a Trinidadian fluent in his dialect.

Then there are two poems by Habib Tiwoni, the first of which, 'My Birthplace', is simple and extremely effective. A delightful little poem that, like a lot of work in this anthology, has a poignant, yearning quality that is quite moving. His second work 'Tshonah/Tekondah' is not as successful and is laboured in comparison.

Damx has created, in his short story, 'The brothers I and I', a modern Jamaican folk tale for, about and from the unemployed and the underemployed. Like Charles' work, it chooses to remain within the culture and language of the roots. It is unpretentious, naturally. There is none of the intellectual trying to write 'rootsy' so that the masses can relate to it.

'A policeman came along and got picked so quick he did not know who done it. It was the quickest I dread had ever picked a pocket, it made him felt proud of his skill, he felt so proud that he smiled at the astonished cop. The cop stopped and asked him, "Why are you standing on the corner instead of working?"

"Bu-bu-but I am working". He replied, still smiling. The cop knew he had lied and asked him,

"Where are you working?"

"I-I-I am working at-at the dom-dom domino factory".

"Then why is it that you are on this corner every-day?" "Tha-tha-that is because my job is to stamp-stamp on the eyes and is only dou-dou-double blank the factory a meck these days", I Dread said'.

This is one of the most complete and satisfying pieces in the book.

'Irma John', by Frank John, is written in the form of a letter to a sister that the author has not seen since he was four years old. He goes over the memories of the times they spent together, two children growing up in the Caribbean in an

atmosphere of innocence and love, until the death of their grandmother leads to their parting. It is a beautiful piece of writing that I wish was longer.

The masterpiece of the book for me is 'Song for Fanon' by John La Rose. It is bold and assertive, clearly rejects the coloniser and his culture and embraces that of the rebels. It speaks for itself:

Caliban is a niggerman

Caliban is a naked ooman

widout clothes

widout clothes

she could take blows

Caliban is a fuckin madman

He eh care a fart

A man after me own heart

fraid ah nuthin

do what dey like

Dey could kiss he backside

He does take dem for ride

The works of Shango Baku and Sebastian Clarke best represent an ideological influence present in most of the other writings in this anthology. Both are capable of weaving words to create textures that sometimes shine, but this ability is often superficial and sterile as is their political thought. Clarke and Baku are rooted in the black power days of the late sixties, where so many black intellectuals have found an uneasy but profitable resting place.

Shango Baku's long and undisciplined poem only once raises its head above the quagmire of black nationalist romanticism to produce a verse of seductive nostalgia. This, alas, is not enough to save the work from being dated and pretentious, though not more so than Clarke's second piece, 'Alkebulan: The motions of Black Queens'. Both are full of harping back to how great everything was in good old Africa before the white man came. Clarke manages to dress up his flight from reality with ancient Egyptian mysticism, but that merely serves to illustrate a backward political position.

It no longer moves me to hear about black queens in pre-European Africa, and what is meant to be a mystic homily to black maternity is, though more approachable than his first piece, just as irrelevant. The black struggle has long past the stage when it needed to look to our distant past for inspiration. To continue doing so is to be blind to the struggle the black proletariat and peasantry are waging and winning today. This ritual calling to the past for strength, reflects an alienation from that struggle and a belief in our present weakness.

The rest of the book is uneventful reading, some of it is okay. George Campbell for example has four nice poems, some of it is esoteric, some of it just bad. It is a collection of mixed quality, in which the bad outweighs the good.

Southall Fights



23rd April 1979 — A Report by Southall Rights
Published by Southall Rights
Reviewed by Lorine Burt-Stapleton

On April 23, 1979, 2,756 police officers were deployed in Southall to allow 60 members of the National Front to hold a meeting at Southall Town Hall. Asians and West Indians, living in Southall, turned out in their thousands to register their protest. They were supported by a fair number of blacks and whites from other communities. The activists of Southall Rights, a free legal advice and general information centre, have documented from their experiences on that day, the now much publicised brutality of the police against anyone they deemed protestors. The pamphlet is titled simply '23rd April 1979'.

The pamphlet begins with a short introduction which explains what the organisation Southall Rights is and states, almost apologetically, that the document does not intend to report on all that happened on the day. It charts the experiences of six people, three members of Southall Rights, one solicitor, one representative of the Commission for Racial Equality and one other individual.

The first section of the pamphlet deals with the protests made by local groups and MPs against the Ealing Council who permitted the National Front to use its premises. The Ealing Council for Community Relations, the various churches, the Sikh Temples, the Indian Workers Association, the Southall Youth Movement, "... in effect the whole community protested, argued, reasoned and begged the council to change its mind".

When this failed, a delegation of representatives of the above groups met the then Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees and

expressed their concern at the increasing tensions within the community caused by the advertised presence of the National Front in the area.

Once it was confirmed that the National Front would hold its meeting on Monday, April 23, we are told that three protests were planned "... with the full knowledge of and without objections from the police."

On Sunday 22, a march from Southall to Ealing was organised and on the Monday, shops were to be closed in the afternoon and a sit-down protest staged outside the Town Hall. We are not told anything of the actual planning of the demonstrations, how it was done, who decided what was to be done and, most importantly, who was organising them.

The march was held on Sunday 22, and two arrests were made. The demonstrators, numbering between three and five thousand, demanded their release. The reader is then given a vivid description of events which took place on the Monday. The document records the beatings, the arrests and taunting by the police officers. The reader is taken systematically through the day, almost hour by hour. The most horrendous act of that day, the beating and subsequent killing of Blair Peach, could not be dealt with because no member of Southall Rights was present at that incident. What we are told is that members of Southall Rights suffered police brutality consistent with the reports of Blair's death.

At the end of the day there were 700 arrests and 342 people charged. Ninety per cent of those charged live in Southall.

There is a section headed, 'Monday Night'. This is a statement by a Mike O'Dwyer who was closely involved in trying to cope with the aftermath of the day's violence. There is another brief

section on the defence of those arrested and we are told that a defence committee was formed. It would have been interesting to know the methods used by the Defence Committee to secure the acquittal of those charged.

The summary is set out in point form. Thirteen points are raised. Among them is stated that Southall Rights is in full agreement with Ealing CRC's indefinite suspension of their dealings with Police Liaison Committees. They also doubt whether Police Liaison Committees could ever have a useful role, and that all evidence points to the fact that the police wanted to teach the Southall community a lesson.

The pamphlet is an attempt by one of the groups involved in the events of April 23, to come to terms with what happened. It is very clear and straightforward. The youth in the Asian community are now beginning to feel the brutality of the police force, the same brutality which has been meted out to young West Indians. Young Asians will find that the West Indian community have the experience of organising on this terrain. Those experiences are there to be drawn on.

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Celebrating Black Culture

Celebrate a Multi-Media Youth Arts Festival held at The Commonwealth Institute
March 28 — April 2
Reviewed by Akua Rugg

'Celebrate — A Multi-Media Youth Arts Festival' is the title of a five day, cultural marathon presented by The Drum Arts Centre in conjunction with the Commonwealth Institute. The Institute's headquarters, a vast and magnificently appointed monument to Britain's colonial past, was invaded by 25 groups drawn from Afro Caribbean communities throughout the country.

The festival encompassed many different art forms — drama, dance, music, painting and photography. However, due to press deadlines, we were only able to cover one day's events, when three dance groups, the Arawak Dancers, Mara Ya Pili, and Ekome performed.

The Arawak Dancers are a group of 14 including a drummer and choreo-

grapher. They gave two performances. The first, performed in practice clothes, was a dance class, with the choreographer putting the group through the various routines of classical and modern ballet techniques. Members of the audience, black and white, aged from four to 70, enthusiastically responded to an invitation to join the group on stage.

The second section of the group's performance expressed Caribbean and African themes with appropriate costumes and hairstyles. By this time, the audience included many young blacks, and when they were invited to join the group, they thronged the stage, and totally disregarding the concept of a workshop, just got on down and did their own thing with the space and music provided by the Institute.

The distinction between trained and untrained dancers blurred in a joyous celebration by performers and their appreciative audience. What distinguished the former from the latter was that the Arawak dancers have developed the everyday, social and cultural activity of their peers through discipline and organisation into an art form.

Organisation, discipline and skill are also the hallmarks of Mara Y Pili, a 20 strong dance group from the Chapeltown area of Leeds, ranging in age from 10 to 20. Their performance was an impressive feat. They presented a series of dances, inspired by sources as diverse as the poems of Linton Johnson, a photographic essay of the lives of the Nuba of Sudan, the Trinidad Carnival and modern ballet.

The group imaginatively recreated the body decoration peculiar to the

Nuba, whilst the modern ballets were excellently designed and conceived, combining elegance and grace with witty sophisticated visual jokes.

The evening culminated in a performance by Ekome. This group is semi professional, supplementing its income by educational demonstrations and government grants. Their performance, as befitted a group, some of whom have 'professional' dance training and who had graduated from amateur black, dance groups, represented a flowering of the rich, cultural activity that has taken root in our communities. The company of nine gave an utterly enthralling and enchanting performance. The five dancers executed traditional West African dances to the accompaniment of the musicians using African instruments. Apart from the ravishing dancing, we were treated to jokes and thrills. One dance was performed on broken glass.

'Celebrate', from the few events I saw, provided an eyeopening, educative and stimulating view of the life enhancing, cultural activity burgeoning in black communities. It informed us of the existence of blacks in Britain, sure of, and taking an intelligent interest in their African heritage and Caribbean cultural traditions. It showed a community with the strengths to meet new challenges and the willingness and ability to explore and master new techniques. It demonstrated, above all, a black community confident and stable enough to take time out of their working lives to organise, build and develop their own independent institutions geared to serving their particular needs and interests.

Photo: Barry Anderson. The Ekome Dancers



Di Black Petty-Booshwah
by Linton Kwesi Johnson
Released by Island Records
Reviewed by Dread Fred

Poets pick their passions, political poets select their enemies. Linton Johnson's career, as a black British poet and recording artist, has left, in its meteoric trail, the charred remains of police, the fascists, the white left organisations, who start with the premise that blacks are weak and those in the black community who live outside the age of reality and 'check fi antiquity'. In a track of his last LP, he turned a critical if affectionate eye on the way black youth 'stay', and 'tek chance' and 'don't count di caas'.

This single release, developed from an extract of his new LP, 'Inglan is a Bitch', is a merciless flaying of the opportunism and 'flaws' of the black petty bourgeoisie. Linton is an ideological poet, and ideology has to steer a course through an ocean of notions. He has been nothing if not clear and clean about what he's for and what he's against. 'Di Black Petty-Booshwah' is a confirmation of this clarity.



Your Enemies

What does the poem say? It observes, with contempt, the class that British blacks have unwittingly engendered, a parasitical class who do the bidding of the state and underestimate the potential and strength of the black working class. Sometimes 'dem a run-up dem mout' an' a shout all about' but basically they are plagued with doubt about the strength of blacks. They seek their position and advancement on the backs of blacks, and have been looked up to, by newspapers if no-one else, as spokespersons. The song says that when it comes to the crunch we see them 'dress back'.

Linton growls out the message. He is no Delroy Wilson, and if there is sweetness in the track, it comes from the music or the listeners's sympathy with the sentiment.

The sentiment is a response to the struggle that Linton has been in the leadership of in the Railton Youth Club, Brixton. The title track is followed by a dub version in which the powerful bass takes the melody, matching the poet's voice in the vocals version. The dub is called 'Straight to Madray's

Head'. The title tells us that the inspiration for 'De Black Petty Booshwah' is directed against the likes of youth leaders who betray the movement of young blacks.

The other instrumental tracks are called 'Action Line' and 'Action Dub', taken from the name of the newspaper which the youth of the Railton club have published as the voice of their struggle.

The music of the tracks is a development of the nouveau-ska of the two tone artists who have recently hit the charts but a subtler, more thoughtful progression tempering the monotonous regularity of the leaping ska beat with the jazz influence of Rico's trombone. Some spectacular moments of reggae cross-fire between the guitars remain too; echoes from the reggae lineage of 'Dread Beat and Blood.'

If the teaser track is a taste of the LP to come, bring on the meal. One small crib, though. I wish the cover had told us that Dickage, and this is a guess, is responsible for the very strong virtuoso base.

Rebel Trouble

Trouble in Brixton
by Eddie Mills
At the Garage
Reviewed by Michael Cadette

'War amongst the rebels. . .madness, madness, war.' Linton Kwesi Johnson intones across the darkened theatre. Fade. Lights go up and, from the left, a young lion of Judah enters a youth club setting. Seating himself down on one of the few pieces of furniture, he displays with a flourish the records he has been carrying. Two others enter, a boy and a girl. The girl informs that a friend of theirs is due to be released from prison. A decision is made. A party will be arranged not only to welcome home the brother, but also to celebrate his escape from the clutches of Babylon. It will be held within the club. One will be responsible for the drink; another for the music. They exit to the left to spread the word.

'Trouble in Brixton' insists that innocent preparations of this kind cannot go uninterrupted without a white, hostile, racist society messing up the works.

The play describes how a section of black youth deal with that racism, once these external troubles are dealt with, how it rears its head again from within the group to mar the celebrations they have prepared.

The setting for the play is a derelict, social club. The clientele are young, black, unemployed male and female rastas and hustlers. They talk in a rich, Jamaican patois stamped with the accent of the cockney black. Their talk is about the latest tune, 'who a check who', the problems of running a sound system without a wage, racist attacks and the police. Old white ladies who stumble into their club are evicted at the end of a knife point. The police, who regularly invade their territory, leave amidst multiple cussings and red stripe tin cans. The position is quite clearly if you are not for the youth then you are against them, and you are dealt with accordingly. But violence is not just meted out to the opposition. A laugh, all too often followed by a cuss, then a thrust of a knife now pulled in jest, the next time, maybe, for real. And when it becomes clear that there is a grass among them, who keeps the police informed, it is only the calm and level headedness of the youth just returned from prison which stops the others turning on a young black outsider — who it emerges, has been wrongly fingered.

'Trouble in Brixton' is written by a sixteen year old, Eddie Mills. It is his first play. He showed it to the Principal of the Drama school, where he attends in his spare time, for her opinion. She advised him to submit it to the Young People's Theatre Scheme organised by the Royal Court, a leading London theatre. Eddie's play was one of seven plays accepted, out of 200, for presentation during their 1980 Young Writers' Festival.

In the play Eddie accurately reproduces the concerns and interests of young blacks, his peers. He skillfully meshes fantasy with documentary. Fantasy embraces the ritual killings, while the defeat of the police is reminiscent of Notting Hill Carnival '76 and Bristol '80. By placing a 'super-grass' within the inner-circle of the youth group, Eddie suggests that the unwaged are particularly susceptible to grassing.

The young black cast is drawn from Hackney Downs and Clapton Girls' schools. Their colourful performances were all the more brilliant when set against the drab, bleak interior of the club. No different, maybe from their own haunts outside school.

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3. What I would most like to learn about my family's history and our Caribbean heritage.
4. Britain is my home but Africa is part of my heritage because. . .
5. I cannot talk to my parents because. . .
- 6 a) Some negative aspects of being black and growing up in a white society are. . .
b) Some positive aspects of being black and growing up in a white society are. . .

Entries to be in by 30 June 1980

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Race Today

VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN NOVEMBER 1980 PRICE 35p



From bobby to babylon: Blacks and the British Police Part 2

JAMAICAN ELECTIONS: BETTA NEVAH COME.

Letters

Dear Race Today,
I am an Italian guy, 21 years old, and my name is Carlo. A lot of times I wanted to write to you but I didn't know what about; well my mind is clearer now (I hope!) so I decided to write. I'm a worker; I work in a proletarian hospital, and I have a hard life (I'm married and my wife has no work) that's one reason why I'm writing to you, I'm interested in your struggle. Another reason is that I bought your political paper five months ago in Amsterdam in the 'Rasta Roots Culture Centre' and I liked it a lot; I knew about it but I never found it here in Italy. They hadn't new copies, but old ones (February 1979 and another of 1979), I would like to be a fighting subscriber so please send me the new price (the old was £5.00 or more, I'll send more) so I could support you better.

I'm also interested about LK Johnson but you could know how impossible it is here in Italy to know and have something about him. Well, you could think why a white man is so interested about the black people's struggles and problems, well I think that there are no black or white people's or for example men or women's problems or struggles but only oppressed people's struggles and problems. I would like to come to England and talk with you about the problem we have and to know more about you.

Another thing is the music that LKJ (I know only him) uses so well to speak about your people's problems, and about the bastard government of that stupid woman called Thatcher. Well I want to support, talk and know more.

Up with our struggles,
Carlo,
Bergamo, Italy.

Dear Race Today,
I would like to tell you of an incident that happened in Nottingham on Thursday 25 September and ask for the comments of your readers.

Last Thursday I went to see the Gregory Isaacs concert, cost £4, at the

Mecca owned Sherwood Rooms, Nottingham. We arrived late and were therefore surprised to find a long queue. No one knew why we were kept waiting. At last we reached the front and almost immediately wished we hadn't. The reason for the hold up was that all the men were being body searched, the women had their handbags emptied and the contents rummaged through. I was furious and refused to be searched but was told no search — no admittance.

Normally the Sherwood Rooms provides tables, chairs and sells a wide variety of drinks. That night the tables and chairs had been removed — not for lack of space — and the only drinks sold were cans of beer, lager and coke at 70p. No glasses were issued. They obviously felt we were unsafe to handle them.

I wrote complaining about such treatment to the Nottingham News who interviewed the manager Mr Cranh. The paper published an article in which Mr Cranh replied, "this is standard procedure with a concert of this nature." He said that this happened at many other branches and felt we were being "suburban" in complaining about it.

Does this happen at other Mecca run establishments? Has it happened at other Gregory Isaacs concerts? If so why do people put up with it? I do not feel we should sit back and accept such treatment. I would like to hear of other people's experiences please.

Margaret Evans,
St. Ann's, Nottingham.

Dear Race Today,
I would like to comment on the review by Eden Charles of the book 'New Planet' (May/June 1980). Firstly, the book was published by Karnak House, and not Third World Publications as Mr Charles suggests. Secondly, he states that my preface was confused and goes on to give an example of confusion which articulately, fortunately, proposes the editor's

position. For information, confusion is characterised by an inability to articulately and coherently express a position or idea. If Mr Charles disagreed or objected to those ideas, then it is his justified and legitimate right to do so. But he should not attempt to communicate to the readers (who do not have the book before them) the idea of confusion which does not exist. The third point I would like to make is the unjustified and illegitimate proposition that this writer was attempting to "harp back to how great everything was in good old Africa" and that I also attempted to "dress up" my "flight from reality with ancient Egyptian mysticism, but that merely serves to illustrate a backward political position."

This is one of the weaknesses, perhaps the greatest outside of "ole talke", of the Caribbean intellectual: anti-intellectualism and lack of attention to history. To use a cliché, history repeats itself and our (black peoples') inability to locate our mistakes or victories/struggles in history and relate them to our present situation results in our further weakness, division and psychological schizophrenia. Fortunately, Walter Rodney understood this necessity to locate our history that is why he paid so much attention to it in his 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.' That is why, also, I have stated in the current (June) issue of 'West Indian Digest' about Black arts: "It does not seek solace in history or recoils in portraying the greatness of our history without dealing with contemporary situations."

Thus, it is your reviewer's myopia in not having a cohesive understanding of Caribbean literary traditions. His review would have benefited enormously if he had done his home work and not pandered to personality and subjective criticism.

Sebastian Clarke,
Karnak House,
London W11 1EH.

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Front cover photos Andrew Ward, Report

The Jamaican Elections: Betta Nevah Come

The Manley government, trapped between its rhetoric and its performance, was overwhelmingly defeated by the Jamaican electorate after eight years in power. And the all embracing social crisis, which has plagued Jamaican society over the past ten years, is no closer to being solved.

The plantation system, which has been the basis of the Jamaican economy for centuries, has collapsed irretrievably. That system, which has set in motion thousands of workers on sugar plantations, and for whom thousands more provided goods and services, has been driven to the wall by producers of beet sugar and other much more productive sugar producers.

And for the past ten years, all the social relations and the political structures, which rest therein, have been thrown into a massive convulsion. This profound dislocation of all the relations in Jamaican society opened up several possibilities. The one possibility, which threatened to transform all else, was the fact that by the end of the 1960's, the working class and peasantry stood on the verge of open revolt. By then, the JLP government had become totally unacceptable to all classes in the population. The vulgar flaunting of wealth, the glaring spectacle of corruption had the effect of undermining governmental authority. Driven by want and neglect, the urban working class and unemployed had telegraphed their intentions by burning and looting in the city of Kingston in October 1968.

It was the possibility of this independent working class and peasant intervention which shaped the politics of Jamaica in the last eight years. Every interest in Jamaican society sought to avoid it; sought to head it off; identified it as a means through which power could be achieved.

'The Times' newspaper in London best articulated the financial and industrial interests of the imperialists. Only a Manley/PNP victory, said 'The Times', could head off the impending social explosion. And it is for this very reason that the traditional property owning middle classes switched their support from the JLP to Michael Manley's party. The radical middle classes, products of university education at home and abroad, now radicalised by the black power movement and different versions of Marxism, abandoned an independent revolutionary course to line up behind the PNP's slogan, 'Betta Must Come'.

There was absolutely no independent revolutionary formation around which the working class and peasantry could rally. They massed behind the PNP which captured the rural vote (the sugar vote) and swept Manley to power.

And like the Shah of Iran, Michael Manley would attempt the revolution from on high. The Shah had the oil wealth at his disposal; Manley had charisma and little else.

By declaring a cooperative system of ownership among plantation workers, Manley would appear radical even though massive compensation was paid to the companies. It was mere tinkering. So too were his much touted social programmes. Anyone who peered beneath the rhetoric would discover that all these radical sounding programmes were geared to extending state patronage to his followers. It is this shameless and time worn misuse of state patronage for the benefit of the followers of one party which creates, in the other, the violent use of gun men. Shelter, wages, opportunities to visit Cuba,

Eastern Europe and the Middle East; the privileges derived from being a brigidista; promotions in the army, the police and the civil service; all turned on the party card, be the holder high or low.

And the relationship with Cuba has to be explained in the context of political opportunism, which has been masquerading as democratic socialism which was neither democratic nor socialist.

In January 1977, Race Today published a discussion between ourselves and John La Rose, the publisher and political activist. This is what John had to say: "... there is something which Dick Hart said that was very significant. He said that Manley personally had told him that he had timed his visit to Cuba to coincide with the bye election in Jamaica. I realised that by that time, the government and the party would be experiencing economic difficulties. Equally, they would not be able to say, 'Betta Must Come', if better was not coming. The population would therefore be restless about promises that the government had made and failed to fulfil. Manley recognised, that in linking his image to the Cuban radical image in Jamaica, the electoral pay off would be immense." Sheer opportunism.

And what is all this moral heart wrenching over CIA intervention? After all, what did they expect? For decades, every successive Jamaican government has been a stooge of the USA whose Monroe doctrine identifies Jamaica as a colony of strategic importance. Manley's challenge to this historic fact was as ill prepared as it was comic. He could not even carry his party with him, and large and key sections at that. Much more to the point, large sections of the working class and peasantry were reacting militarily to the fact that the government discriminated against them by doling out state patronage to its followers to the exclusion of all. We need to remind ourselves that the CIA is powerless once the masses of the workers and peasants are independently mobilised.

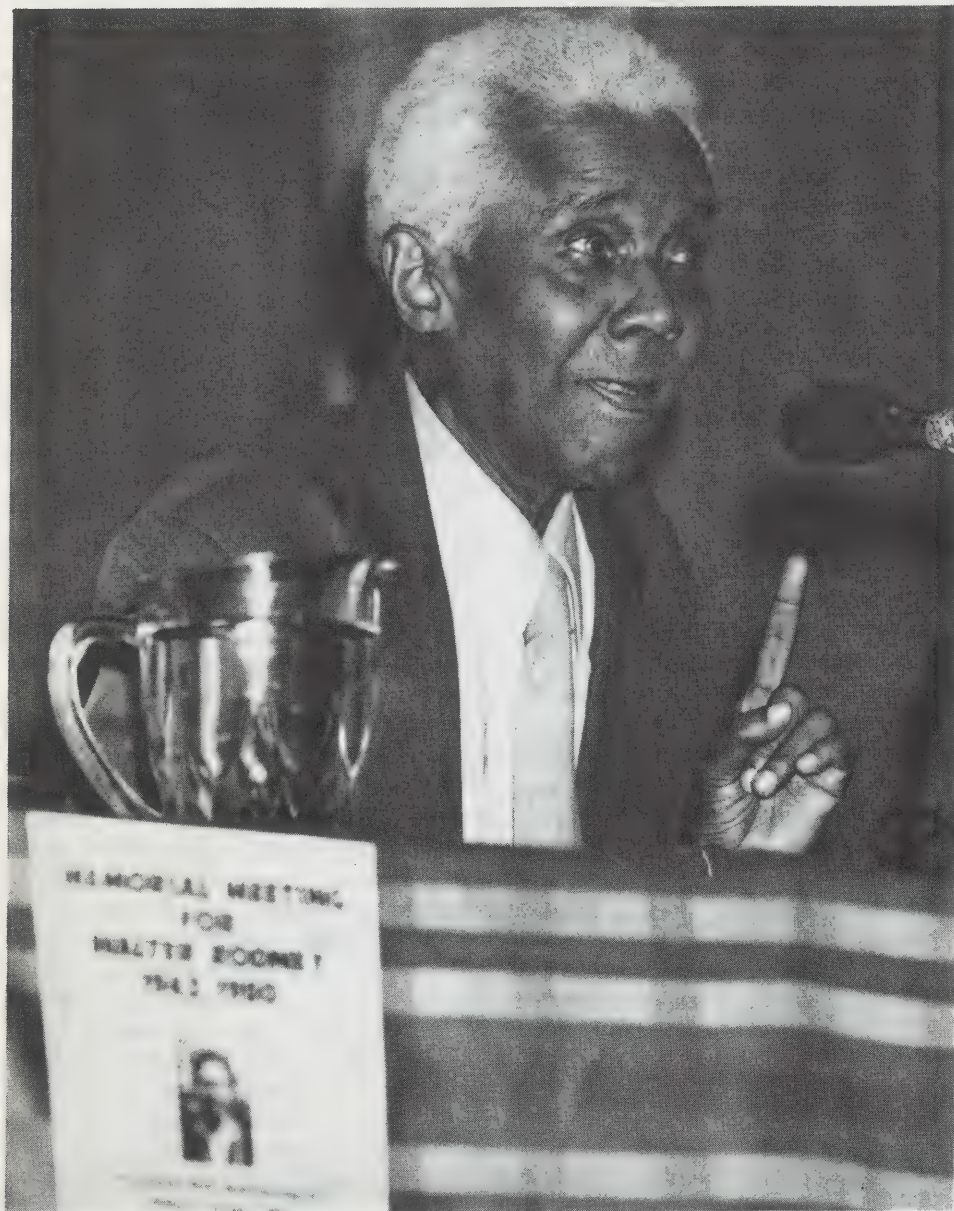
And throughout Manley's reign, sections of the working class rallied around an independent trade unionism and politics as evidenced by the rise of the WPJ. Today, that organisation has managed to shut out huge sections of the working class and peasantry. Its slavish adherence to Moscow and the equally slavish support, however critical, for Manley, have stained them with the old politics.

And what has Seaga to offer? To identify him as a right wing fascist is mere babbling. He is a traditional, West Indian, begging bowl politician. A little aid here, a project or two there, and endless state patronage to his followers. That is all. Apart from that, he is likely to turn savagely on the middle class radicals, and we understand that most of them have their Green Cards which offer security in the US of A.

The Jamaican working class and peasantry are still faced with the task of establishing its organisational independence against the traditional trade unionism and politics of the PNP and the JLP. Eight years of Manley have considerably undermined their capacity for this task.

Race Today Collective
November 1980.

CLR James on Walter Rodney



This speech was delivered by C L R James at a memorial rally for Walter Rodney held at Conway Hall on October 20, 1980, a week after his death.

The rally was organised by the Committee Against Repression in Guyana (CARIG). Other speakers were John La Rose, publisher and political activist; Muhammed Rahman Babu, former minister in Tanzanian government; Sam Silkin, former Attorney General; Professor Richard Gray, School of Oriental and African Studies; Leeland De Cambra, Working Peoples Alliance Support Group (UK).

I regret that I'm a little weak owing to the years, but I'm weak down below in the legs, not in the head. Tonight I want to say a few words about my personal relations with Walter Rodney which were always suitable owing to the kind of person he was, and then to draw some outline of what we have lost by him and what we have to make known clearly: what we

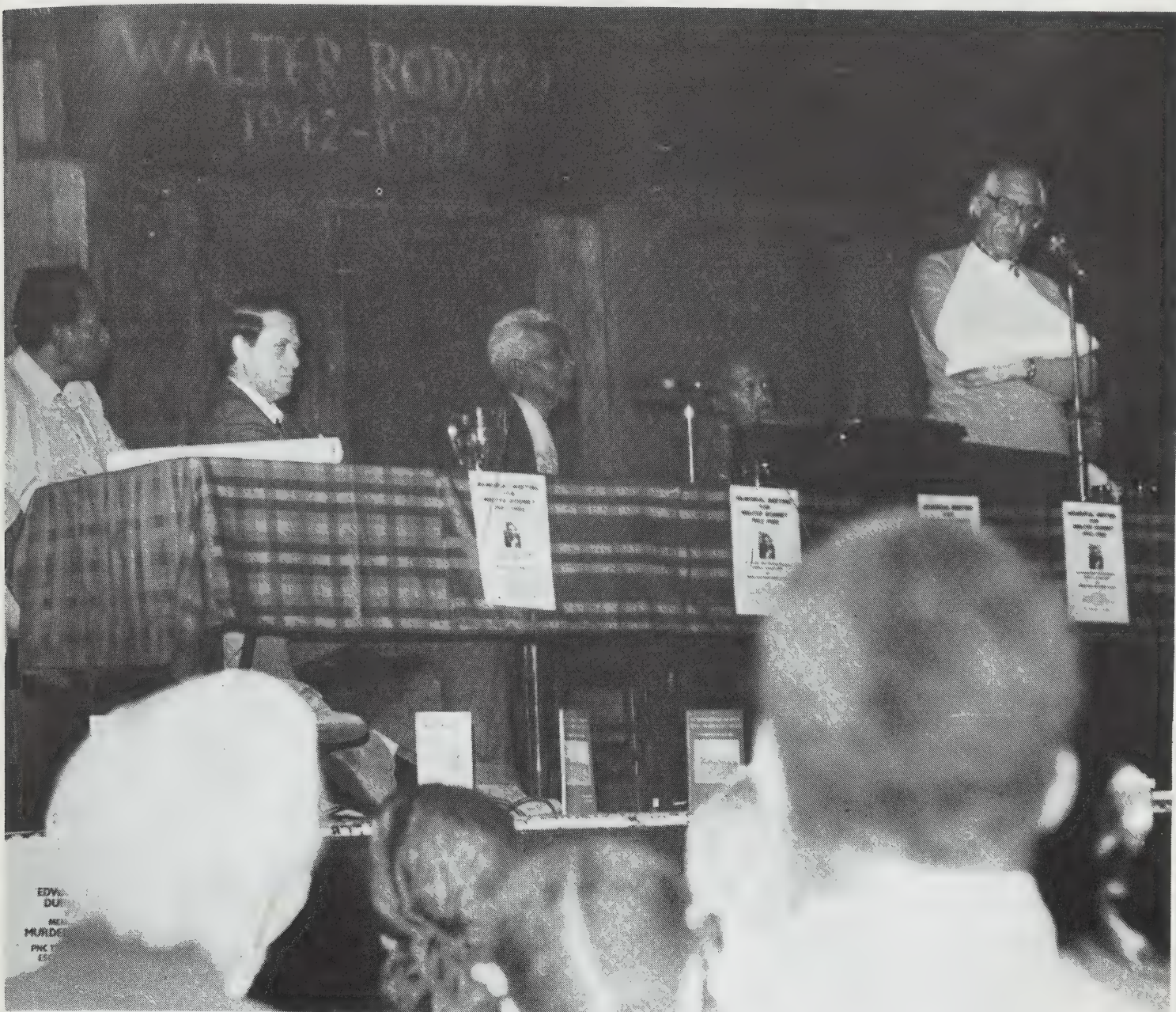
have lost, and the person whom he was and the person whom he could have been.

I left Trinidad where I had been working with Eric Williams in 1963. It became impossible to go on. I published one or two books in London, and Walter Rodney and some other young West Indians came to me and asked me if I would hold some classes. So my first contact with him

was to hold classes for six months. At the end of the classes, I said, "now, look here, each of us has got to do something to show that although we have studied in general, we are able to concentrate this knowledge on some particular subject". And people chose various subjects. Walter Rodney interested me particularly. First of all, he was socially a very quiet man. Secondly, what he talked about was the slave trade in Africa, the beginnings of the slave trade. And he didn't complain about how evil the slave trade had treated the slaves; he spoke about the impact of the slave trade on Africans in relation to that period. I was immensely struck by it. I was struck though I knew nothing about the subject. But the way in which he did it showed me why he had gone to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

The next time I met him was in Canada where there was a meeting of black writers, and Rodney was often chairman of the meeting. He handled the post with the necessary firmness, but with genuine understanding of the requirements of people, all of whom wanted to speak whether they could speak or not. I found it strange that he had left Jamaica. I was informed that Rodney knew it would be difficult for him to get back in. He had been going round in Jamaica talking every Sunday morning to black people about the history of Africa, and he didn't leave Jamaica and be prohibited from returning by accident. He and his friends sat down and discussed whether he should go or not, and they finally decided that he should take the risk. He took it and the results were tremendous. There was an upheaval in Jamaica, not only amongst the students but among the black people to whom he used to talk every Sunday morning. Motor cars were burnt, houses were dilapidated and so forth. All on account of Walter Rodney and the work that he had been doing in the University of the West Indies. That shows another capacity, not only the scholar to deal with slavery and the African slave trade, but the capacity to move ordinary working class people with the history of Africa and the fact that he represented some emancipation for the African people.

Then I saw a book that he had published. A book that represented the work he had done in Jamaica. It is called 'The Groundings with my Brothers', published by the Bogle-L'Ouverture organisation here in London. And I want to recommend that book to you as one of the finest



Platform at memorial meeting. Photo: Julian Stapleton

studies of the life of the African people, not history of dates and people but the life of the African people in short form. That book is one of the best that I know, and I want to recommend it to you, 'The Groundings with my Brothers'. It isn't very long, it isn't very expensive, but we have to keep that book going, not only because of what it represents and shows how Rodney used to think, but because it is of the greatest value in understanding the population of the African people today.

Well then, Rodney went to Guyana and he used to come to the United States quite often. There were universities in the United States which used to invite him to hold semesters there, and the University of Michigan, some years ago, devoted a week to the study of the work of C L R James. That is me, and we invited a lot of people and Rodney was there. I remember him sitting up in the corner and I remember his intervention. That was first class, as usual. But later they be-

gan to speak of the necessity of getting the university to give me an honorary degree. And I remember very well Rodney, up in the corner, saying, "Now the question of the honorary degree, that we can work out, but what we can do is this: in Africa, a person who has reached the age and the experience and the reputation of James, is known as 'Mzee', and I recommend that we give him that degree here and now". And from that time, a whole number of people have called me Mzee. And he introduced that.

Then he went to Guyana, and he wasn't able to get the post which all the scholastic people in Guyana wanted him to have. But he used to come to the United States regularly. I know, during the last two years, I have attended three meetings in which Rodney had been asked to come to the United States to speak about Africa and the African situation. And the last meeting at which he spoke I was the chairman, because my college, the University of the District of Columbia, in-

vited Rodney to speak and asked me to take the chair. He was the same Rodney he had been in the years before, quiet, without demonstration, but solid with a mass of material, logically developed. I could feel what he was saying going home to his audience.

Well, I was waiting to hear that something would happen to him. I went to Trinidad. Rodney would come to Trinidad to the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. Then I heard that the WPA had been formed, the Working Peoples Alliance. At once, I felt very nervous. You see, right through the Caribbean, the population as a whole is critical, sometimes very hostile to the existing regimes. In Trinidad they are absolutely anxious that Williams and his party should get out of it, but they have nobody to represent them, and we have, strongly, the habit of being ruled by the colonial governor, the single person. We have lived that way for three or four hundred years and it isn't easy to get rid of it. But the

moment I heard that the WPA had been formed in Guyana, and I heard what was going on, I sent a public telegram to the WPA. I congratulated them on having been formed. I said that their victory was certain and I asked them please to take note of the danger of assassination of Walter Rodney. That is published in the Trinidad press and right through the Caribbean. It was published in Guyana. Because I was certain, only for this reason: In Trinidad, you could want to get rid of the Williams regime and of Williams himself, but there was nobody else who we could put to represent the powers that wanted to take over. But in Guyana, Rodney was absolutely made to get rid of Burnham and take his position. He was a great scholar, he was an international scholar, and he hadn't been mixed up in Guyanese politics before. He wasn't mixed up at all. He was absolutely new and Burnham would know that, and therefore, I warned them to be careful, "be sure that you guard Rodney from assassination". I thought that might have helped; it didn't help.

Now, John La Rose has spoken and others will speak about Rodney. I want now to go into something else. We face, in the Caribbean, over the next ten or twenty years, a tremendous difficulty in developing the country, to make the government and the people really recognise what they are, feel what they are and do the immense amount of work that we can do. And I know no single person of his age more suitable to carry on that work as Walter Rodney would have been. **That's the kind of loss we have had, that is the loss in Guyana, that is the loss in the Caribbean.** But there is something else, something that is waiting. We in the Caribbean have played an important role in the development of the African revolution. I am not going to call the names, but I know that it is very important that we as black people and colonial people get together and be able to understand one another and contribute to each other. We have a lot to contribute to them, but they have a lot to contribute to us from the Caribbean too. I know nobody, no one more suitable for that position than Walter Rodney. **That's what we have lost.** Furthermore, all over the United States, Walter Rodney is known. I have been to Tanzania three times and I always ask about him, and they have always spoken in the highest terms of him. That communication between the Caribbean and Africa and the United States to bind the people together, **that we have lost. That's what we have lost in Walter Rodney.** We have not only lost a distinguished son of the soil. This is a man who had a role to



Drawing: Una Howe

play in the international development of all our people.

And I want to add this finally. When the time came for the conference that was held in Dar es Salaam (the sixth Pan African Congress), Walter could not attend, but he sent a document round, he circulated the document to me and I read the document. A completely Marxist document, beautiful analysis. Nobody with Marxist training or experience could have done it better and I was somewhat disturbed. I wrote him and told him, "but look here, I agree with everything you say but it is of no use carrying this document to that conference". As it is they have done nothing, but if they had got that document, they would have done still less. But as time has passed, I believe that the mistake I made was in thinking that that document should have been done another way, because that is what we require at the present time.

It is not only that we of the Caribbean would have had somebody in Walter Rodney who would have helped to knit the Caribbean to Africa and to the people in the United States. It is in that general unity of the working class people, we had a representative who was able to meet any member of the opposite movement, any part of England, any part of Europe, meet them on their level and show them that he understood not only the African people and the people of the Caribbean but he understood their movement as well. **That is what we have lost,** and we have to see to it that people recognise, not only what he has been, but what he would have been. I am writing my autobiography, and it is going to be dedicated to Walter Rodney. We have to do things of that kind so that people will know what Walter has been to us and what he could have been to the world that is crying out for people like him. (Standing ovation)

From bobby to babylon

Blacks and the British police

by DARCUS HOWE

Part 2



In our last issue, we published the first part of the series, 'From Bobby to Babylon: Blacks and the British Police Force', which linked the struggles of working class West Indians against police brutality. Below, we continue the second part of this series.

Until the summer of 1968, the corruption and brutality visited on the black community by the police, and the resentment and hostility which police malpractice had generated among blacks, remained largely privatised and ghettoised.

One could still, in those days, encounter blacks who would recoil in disbelief when told of the experiences of others at the hands of the police. 'No British bobby would behave in such a way', they seemed to be saying. Or perhaps a look of total incredulity would greet complaints of police malpractice. Among whites it was not an issue at all. They had heard nothing and knew even less.

The strategy employed by black and multi-racial groups served to reinforce this privatisation of our experiences. It was based in the view that a liberal section of the British ruling classes could be mobilised to use their power to ameliorate the colonial conditions under which we lived. Blacks are helpless victims whom the liberals, with black middle class aspirants alongside them, would assist in adjusting to the discipline and control of capitalist institutions. It meant tea and sympathy meetings with Chief Supt. Norman and others of his ilk who were appointed to liaise with white liberals and blacks on matters of 'difficulties' with police officers. It meant activating the interest of this or that member of parliament or the House of Lords who had distinguished himself as having anti-colonial sentiments and who would perhaps whisper in the ear of the Home Secretary in extreme cases. What had to be avoided at all costs was the airing of this issue in public which would inevitably unleash the power of working class blacks through which whites would be educated and forced to take a position.

BBC TV: CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Those of us who kept plugging for a public debate, as a precondition for unleashing the power of working class blacks, were to experience success in the most unlikely quarter. A BBC producer had been introduced to this area of the black experience and was moved to produce a documentary in the popular series 'Cause for Concern'. The series aimed to

air those serious issues which affected sections of the population in the United Kingdom. A live discussion followed each documentary. The contents of this documentary were bold and unambiguous. Victims of police malpractice would be seen and heard offering dramatic revelations which were to be signed, sealed and delivered by an ex-police officer who had agreed to appear on the programme to detail his experiences at Chelsea Police Station in London. The first 20 seconds of the documentary illustrated a case of police brutality against a white building worker, included perhaps to show that black and white suffered alike. There then followed other cases, all involving blacks, which would reveal to millions of viewers that the police physically brutalised blacks, framed us on trumped up charges and fabricated evidence to secure criminal convictions. This documentary would be followed by a live discussion. The participants were organised to include senior Metropolitan police officers on one side with black activists, the ex-police officer, a practising barrister and three of the victims on the other side. A BBC presenter would mediate the discussion.

The screening of the 'Cause for Concern' programme turned out to be a major watershed in the struggle in which the police and the black community were locked. A conspiracy of silence had kept the issue from public view thereby reinforcing the untrammelled power exercised by the police over the black community. The screening of the programme would surely alter the balance of power in this all important struggle.

Once the police establishment discovered what the contents of the film were to be, they set in motion a series of desperate manoeuvres aimed at keeping it out of the public view. It is worth recording these in some detail.

Robert Mark, the then Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, describes in his autobiographical tract, 'In the Office of Constable', the atmosphere at Scotland Yard:

"Representatives of the Met were only allowed to see the film after its completion. They were horrified. The commissioner objected to the viewing and the BBC got cold feet. Then of course the civil libertarian Press began to rage about censorship and to make

matters worse the commissioner gave a brief interview to ITV. The BBC therefore decided to go ahead."

Mark's record conceals more than it reveals. It was not simply a case of the commissioner objecting. Senior officers at Scotland Yard, with a legal minion in tow, issued every conceivable threat against BBC staff. They were ready to withdraw any future cooperation with BBC journalists; they threatened to invoke the might of the civil law as talk about injunctions flew thick and fast. The BBC management bowed to police pressure and the film was withdrawn from the air.

What Mark described as the Civil Libertarian press was not the only force hot on the heels of the BBC. The story broke in the national press as an anti-censorship lobby swung into action. A picket was mounted at the BBC's Lime Grove Studios. The police reacted viciously and indicated that they would sink to any depths in their determination to keep the issue away from the public. They, at once, arrested black power activist, Obi Egbuna, on a charge of uttering and writing threatening to kill police officers at Hyde Park, and with the trumpeters of Fleet Street in full attendance, the police were now made out to be on the defensive against a black, murderous fanaticism. The screening of such a programme in the present atmosphere, argued the commissioner on the opposite television channel, would stir up fanatical passions and indeed, with Egbuna's trial outstanding, the screening of the programme would violate the sub judice rule. It was a desperate legal bid but one easily squashed.

As public criticism threatened to develop into a crescendo, the BBC turned tail and ran. The documentary and the discussion arranged to follow were back on the scheduled list of programmes. All this took place in full view of the black community and the general public thereby ensuring a formidable increase in the numbers who would view the programme. We were not to know, at least not at that point, that the police would not concede defeat.

The civilian participants in the live discussion arrived at the BBC studios at Lime Grove at least one hour before the discussion was scheduled to go on the air. We were hustled by nervous BBC officials into the small and airless hospitality room. Robert Mark, Ray Merricks from



the Community Relations Branch at Scotland Yard and Reg Gale of the Police Federation were housed next door.

We, the civilian participants, were cock-a-hoop from our recent victory and exuded the confidence which victory generates. Only days before we were together on the picket line demanding that the BBC screen the film; we were part of the discussions which assessed the nature of the anti-censorship struggle into which we had been thrown. We were therefore sharp and on the alert for any manoeuvres which the opposition might set in motion.

We were not to be disappointed. A BBC official crept into our room, cleared his throat nervously and announced that there would be a minor alteration in the arrangements for the live discussion. On the particular case which involved the white building worker, the film omitted to mention that the building worker had twice been convicted for carrying offensive weapons and that a City of London policeman had received £100 from the Criminal Injuries Board arising from his last arrest. And so, said the nervous official, the police would like to produce, as a witness, the officer who had received compensation. The witness would be examined and cross examined by the BBC presenter and ourselves.

Confronted by the fact that the exam-

ination of the police officer, his questioning and cross questioning, would exhaust the time slated for the discussion, we asked the BBC official to leave the room so that we might consider the proposal.

It was clear that the police wished to avoid any discussion on the central question of what they were doing to blacks.

Mark again describes the atmosphere from which this latest manoeuvre sprung: "Clearly", Mark said,

"we had to be represented in the subsequent discussion and there were no volunteers. The day before it was due to be shown the commissioners told me that since I had more television experience than anyone else in the Met I was to do it. I had no illusions about the task or about the good wishes I took with me."

The police reinforced their latest manoeuvre with a reckless alternative. If they did not get their way, they would not participate.

We emerged from our cabal with the firm but polite response that we did not wish to enter into any debate about the white building worker. We were there to discuss matters concerning blacks and the issue of the white worker was peripheral to this exercise. We were

prepared to go on the air nevertheless. Neither the BBC nor the police were told what our trump card would be. We decided to continue the struggle to have the witness removed in full view of the millions who had tuned into the programme. We would expose the history of police attempts to have the film banned and their latest manoeuvre would be explained in that context. Should they persist with their demand, we would walk out of the studios at a pre-arranged signal. In all this we were guided by the fact that we knew the black community to be ready and willing to engage official society in an uncompromising struggle to break out from the stranglehold of our isolation. We went on the air, with the embarrassed BBC presenter attempting in vain to mediate between the warring factions. The police persisted with their demand. "The witness had to appear. We will have every opportunity to cross examine him and the public would be the final arbiters."

The signal was given, and as we moved to stage the walkout, publicly announcing what we were about to do, Reg Gale of the Police Federation relented. Thereafter, point after point went in our favour, once we had established that the police were down to the bottom of the barrel as they sought reasons to avoid the major issues.

Two clear positions emerged finally from this public debate. The police refused to accept the all pervasiveness of police oppression in the black community. The cases portrayed in the documentary were really isolated incidents created by a minority of rotten apples which any police force was bound to contain. And against these recalcitrant elements, the black community was well protected by the complaints system. The victim had only to lodge his complaint at a local police station to set in motion impartial police officers who would investigate the incident and justice would prevail. After all, they emphasised, the British police were the best in the world.

The black participants scotched the rotten apple theory. Police brutality and corruption were rampant inside the black community and the complaints system; with police investigating police, was a mere sham, producing the ritual reply that allegations against this or that police officer were not proven. One of the black activists rounded off his contribution with a clearly stated position: "The police must stop framing and brutalising blacks or the black community would organise to stop them." The success of the programme (both the film and the discussion) and the victory over attempts by the police to suppress the programme had important consequences for the struggle being waged by the black community to throw the burden of police oppression off our backs and to exercise our control and discipline over a police force, the members of which are our servants.

The fact that the film was shown at all, bold and unambiguous as the contents were, would strengthen the belief in the black community that the police armour could be penetrated and that they were not the invincible power they appeared to be. In short, they could be taken on and defeated. This would give tremendous strength and confidence to the movement.

Secondly, the struggle would no longer be conducted in isolation from the rest of society. Once our experiences at the hands of the British police had crashed into public view, the black movement against police oppression could assess who our friends and enemies were and what hurdles had to be overcome. Immediately following the programme the popular left journal, 'Black Dwarf,' would carry a full transcript of the film and discussion. The doubting Thomases in the black community would be jolted out of their complacency and the process through which whites would be educated

on an issue of crucial importance to black citizens would be set in motion.

And thirdly, the veil of impartiality would be torn from the image of the British police. They were seen to be recalcitrant in their refusal to accept and do anything about the all pervasive-ness of their malpractices. And we were in no doubt, none whatever, that the police took such a rigid and hard position because they were certain of the support of politicians and large sections of the established press.

This changed balance of forces would play havoc with those black and multi-racial groups whose very existence served to fortify, within the black community, that our weakness was as such that no other approach but 'the whisper-in-the-ear of authority' was possible.

IDEOLOGY: THE WAY FORWARD

How were we now to proceed became the central question which increasingly dominated this particular struggle. This begged the subsidiary question as to the reasons why the British police were behaving in this way towards blacks. The answers would reveal two political attitudes which would develop into major tendencies inside the black struggle as the rebellion of black workers against police oppression became a feature of national politics.

There was one tendency which could be described as nationalist. They were adamant that Britain was a racist society and it flowed from this that white police officers would themselves be racists. Police officers allowed this subjective emotion to cloud their judgements and behaviour towards blacks. It would follow, equally, that this tendency would call for the elimination of racism from within the police force. They would aim to restructure police training to include courses on the cultures of blacks they would participate en masse in the Race Relations Industry through which a gentle and polite dialogue would be held with police liaison officers from the Community Relations Departments of the respective forces; they would call for black police officers. They were dominated by the ideological position that the black working class was powerless and would always remain so. The white working class was irretrievably racist and no alliance with them was possible. We had to unite with that section of British society which had the

power — the liberal sections of the ruling class.

The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, a mere carcass by then, and the small islandic groupings, which displayed such sparkle and energy in assisting the newly arrived West Indians in making the social and cultural adjustments on this strange and hostile terrain, could not see beyond racialism and would now become irrevocably part of the status quo. Leading personnel in these organisations were induced to apply for jobs in the state controlled Race Relations industry. Those who had distinguished themselves in the subtleties of whispering were appointed to overlord the race relations bureaucracy.

The other tendency, the revolutionary tendency, would accept that the police force was replete with racist sentiments; but that was not the fundamental cause by any means. The fundamental reason, we argued, turned on the fact that the black community had to be disciplined and organised to produce wealth at little cost to capitalists. The discipline and obedience required would not only be confined to the factory but had to be extended throughout all areas of our social lives. The foremen at our various places of work would ensure that we performed as was necessary, and the police were on the front line in seeing to it that we went about our social lives in the straitjacket required for the obedient worker. Any deviation from the norm would necessitate stringent even brutal reaction. To be unemployed and on the streets meant that we were not being productive. The original charge of loitering with intent, *sus*, would involve the magistracy and prison officers in whipping us back into line. Late night parties, *sheebens*, carnival festivals et al would disrupt the smooth rhythm of the working day and therefore had to be harassed out of existence. The fact that police officers were racists would greatly assist Capital in exercising the harshest of disciplines over this new workforce.

Every conceivable colonial myth would be regurgitated to justify what the police were doing. We were basically lazy and slothful, prone to vice, crime and *bach-anallian* activity. At the slightest opportunity, we would opt for not working at all. It had to be the British police, descendants of the overseers on the slave plantation who, as knights in shining armour, would ensure that we produced the surplus value required for British capitalism's post war revival.

Jim Callaghan, then an ordinary member of parliament, described our pur-

pose with a brutal precision:

"Every immigrant represents a store of capital. It costs £400 to raise, educate and train a person for productive employment and this sum is transferred as a free export wherever immigration takes place Britain, with full employment and an immense programme of rebuilding to be tackled needs immigrants urgently. we have a population of 50 million, a working population of 25 million and it is this productive group that feeds and clothes and shelters all our children and pensioners. Each new immigrant at work helps provide for the unproductive half of the population. Ask the Germans how they managed to win prosperity from the shambles of 1945. Hard work? Yes. But with a labour force strengthened by millions of immigrants. Germany lost the war and was paid reparations in human capital."

For us the only countervailing power capable of releasing the black community from this exercise of state power was the black working class, human capital, unified, disciplined and organised by the very mechanism of capitalist production. We viewed the mass rebellion of the black working class as inevitable and it was only through such a rebellion, skillfully orchestrated and organised, that the white working class could be set in motion.

YOUNG BLACKS

The clash between these two tendencies inside the black struggle would become even sharper because of the profound changes in composition and consequently in the consciousness of the West Indian population. Thousands of young blacks, who were either born in Britain or who had grown up on native soil, were now entering the labour market with expectations nurtured in the schooling system. They ate school dinners with the same ease as their white counterparts, passed or failed the same examinations, suffered equally, the bankrupt ritual that passes for education in these parts. Their expectations were identical to those of young whites.

And what were they offered? These young blacks were to discover that the buyers of labour power required them to be channelled into those jobs which their parents had no alternative but to



Photo: Dennis Morris

accept. Their white counterparts would enter the world of apprenticeships which their parents had secured through the generations. The trades were the preserve of the white elite. The unskilled, deadly boring and repetitive work, distinguishable by its unsocial hours would be the preserve of blacks.

And how they rebelled! En masse, young blacks refused to follow their parents into these jobs. By their rebellion, they created a shortage of labour in certain areas of the economy. They offered little or no competition to the older generation. No queues could be found outside the factories and the recruiting offices of the service industries as obtained in the late fifties and early sixties. The older blacks could successfully unleash a torrent of industrial struggles for increased wages and better working conditions without any fear of being replaced by willing school leavers.

Some of the youth took what jobs were available but their employers found them to be quite a different kettle of fish from their parents.

This force of young blacks were free from the constraints which kept the older generation at heel. Firstly, they were free and still remain so from any experience of class demoralisation and defeat. Secondly, they were socialised in large numbers in class rooms alongside white working class youth and therefore had a better measure than did their parents of how whites would respond to concerted black mobilisation on any of the issues we were up against. And thirdly, they were free from the inhibiting myth that sooner or later they would return to

their native land. For them Britain is home.

The development of young blacks inside British capitalism rendered them incompatible with the social arrangements they had inherited.

This new presence in the social and political life of the black community would dissipate any lingering doubts that the Labour Party would be the political vehicle for black working class emancipation.

And the organisational and theoretical impasse had to be broken. It was a matter of extreme urgency since the police, having established their unbridled power in the 1950's and 1960's, would turn their undivided attention to the rebellious young blacks. The 'sus' weapon, so finely perfected in the earlier period, would be unleashed without mercy. The police, now armed with the powers of stop and search under the Misuse of Drugs Act, sought out the black youth who were easily identifiable targets. The reggae culture brought together hundreds of youths at a time in youth clubs all over the country, and the police would storm these institutions in the same manner as they did the homes of West Indians in the earlier period.

The organisational question would now be resolved by another section in the vast industrial army of international black labour. The American section of this international army of black labour would harass, tease and taunt the American power structure from the late sixties and for a decade after with the slogan 'Black Power'. Under this banner, the theory of independent, black working class, revolutionary and radical organisation would be teased out.

Stokely Carmichael followed Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to Britain to lay down, at a conference titled 'The Dialectics of Liberation', the basic thinking and experience behind the slogan 'Black Power'. It was this event, coupled with the unceasing flow of literature from North America, which would break the impasse, to which the social movement, with particular concerns about police oppression, had succumbed.

The theory and philosophy of 'Black Power' would answer the questions, some fully and others partially, so urgently posed in the late sixties.

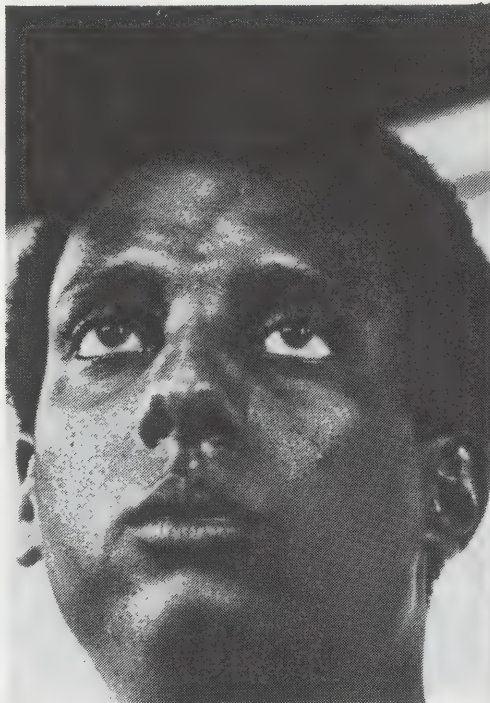
Young blacks organised themselves into Black Power groups throughout the country, linking North, Midlands and South in a national movement. Though a small minority actually joined organisations, the existing political ethos was dominated by the philosophy and political perspective of 'Black Power'. The older West Indians were, by and large, absent

from mass gatherings and political activism. They offered their sympathy and support, moderated by some reservations at the boldness and audacity of this new force. Political movements of some significance always announce themselves with this uneasy balance between different sections of the class or social grouping involved.

Heading the agenda of every one of these organisations' programmes was the issue of police oppression in the black community. There resided in the black power organisations and the campaigns they fought an uneasy alliance between the nationalists and the revolutionary tendency.

By the summer of 1970, the incompatibility posed by young blacks would blossom into open rebellion, encouraged by and drawing strength from what others were doing and acting on in other areas of British society and in different theatres on the international scene. Strikes and shop floor rebellions among older black workers' moved the journal, 'British Industry Week' (6.6.69) to comment. "As another troubled summer starts in the U.S., employers there are getting worried. Worried about the rising influence of the Black Power Movement in industry. In the motor industry there the revolutionary fervour of black militants is high. . . Already there have been signs that Britain's coloured labour is capable of militancy." (The phase 'is capable' remains instructive. The entire British economy was run on the assumption that we weren't). Homeless white workers plagued local councils with a squatting movement in which thousands seized empty housing stock in order to house themselves. An enormous rent strike engulfed East London and the Trades Unions were letting everyone know that a wage freeze would not be tolerated.

What was lacking on the home front would be adequately supplied in activity further afield. The Catholic working class in Northern Ireland had given notice that British oppression would be severely challenged; African peasants would resort to armed struggle to resist and finally overthrow Portuguese colonial oppression, the Black Panthers in the U.S.A. called the unemployed, urban poor to armed rebellion; De Gaulle hung on to power by his finger tips as all Europe shook under the weight of working class revolt. In the Caribbean, Trinidad in particular, workers and peasants were out on the streets. A helicopter stood by waiting to evacuate the Prime Minister, Eric Williams, after demonstrations and strikes all but toppled the regime. And the Vietnamese peasantry were well on their way to



Stokely Carmichael. Camera Press
Below: US Black Panthers



debunking the myth that the American power structure was invincible.

Young blacks, here in Britain, would lead the rebellion against police oppression sure in the belief that they were part of an international movement, rich in variety.

MANGROVE STRUGGLE

Street fighting erupted in North London between young blacks and the police, resulting in a few arrests. At the end of the day, the black youth stormed the Caledonian Road police station and demanded the release of those arrested. Hours later, we received news that Johnathan Jackson had walked into a



Black youth in Detroit USA. Photo: Bob Scott

Californian court, armed to the teeth, demanding the release of his brother George and other black prisoners.

Within two days, some three hundred blacks and a handful of white supporters presented themselves on the streets of Notting Hill there to demonstrate, with chilling effect, their opposition to attempts by the West London police to harass the Mangrove Restaurant out of existence.

It was this event and the political trial which followed that altered completely all the methods through which our struggles against the police and the courts had been conducted. It would lay down the guidelines which would haunt all future political activity on this score. In short, it was an historic event.



The Mangrove Restaurant was an attempt by the Trinidadian owner, Frank Critchlow, at providing an up market West Indian cuisine in Notting Hill. It was a development on the Rio Coffee Bar which he ran in the late fifties and early sixties. By then, Notting Hill had become a major area in which the new black immigrants had settled. Dotted throughout the community were small clubs and eating houses organised by West Indians for West Indians. It was on this terrain that the West Indian community fought off the white attackers in the Notting Hill riot of 1959.

The Rio Coffee Bar catered for the unemployed section of the West Indian community. The basement housed a gambling club operated outside of the

discipline of the Gaming Act. There were quite a number of these in the area. Some of the proprietors were forced into paying sums to the police so that they could operate freely; they provided the base from which pay offs were made to the police for the favour of not opposing bail for one of their clients; they facilitated contacts through which bribes were paid so that previous convictions would not be read out in court; they provided the habitation for the police penetration of the ganja trade. Frank Critchlow distinguished himself as an opponent of these practices. In fact he organised opposition to police corruption and other excesses. Along with others, he pioneered the organisation 'Defence' with its headquarters at his home in Maida Vale.

'Defence', the precursor of Release, was formed when Lennard Waithe, one of the Rio's clients, was sentenced to four years imprisonment on a trumped up charge of living off immoral earnings. The organisation aimed to provide legal advice and assistance to those victimised by the police. Henceforth, Frank's cuisine would be seasoned with a fair sprinkling of political action. He would be marked for future reference as a trouble maker with anti-police sentiments.

By the late 1960's, Notting Hill had welcomed a new addition of migrants. The sons and daughters of the international white middle classes, imbued with the heady mix of flower power, had set up communes and other radical institutions in the area. The Mangrove served up market soul food to this mixed clientele during the evenings and a black barrister was on hand throughout the day to train all his energies and skills on the Notting Hill, Notting Dale and Harrow Road police stations.

The presence of a barrister served as a major disruption to the well rehearsed procedures for dealing with black suspects at these police stations. He fought successfully the lame and malicious opposition to bail. With the immediate presence of a lawyer at a police station, the chances of suspects making statements of admission under pressure were cut to a minimum; the time and space within which beatings could take place were greatly reduced. The police stood to lose both income and some of the weapons in their arsenal of oppression. The Mangrove had to go.

There developed, in every police station responsible for policing the black community, a group of policemen who had impressed their superiors and colleagues that they were proficient at handling blacks. Their names were familiar to most. The Notting Hill contingent was known as the heavy mob; spearheaded by

a P.C. Pulley and included P.C.s Rogers, Lewis and Reid. These officers trained all their energies on the Mangrove and mobilised other officers to do the same. The mere mention of Pulley would strike terror in the hearts of blacks in Notting Hill. He strutted through the streets of Notting Hill, administering sharp doses of capitalist discipline, abjuring all legal procedure. He was the colonial governor reincarnate.

He led sortie after sortie into the Mangrove. There were three drug raids in six months backed by a deluge of residents' objections to the council's renewal of the all night licence. The sheer concentration of all this activity in a six month period led all to believe that the residents' objections were prompted by the police. The raids produced no evidence of drugs on the premises and the fact that we were all aware that nothing of the kind obtained at the Mangrove, sharpened the urgency for action.

Frank Critchlow explored every avenue provided by official society but to no avail. Local M.P.'s, the police complaints system, the Home Office, social workers, advice centres, even a member of the House of Lords. No redress. Frank discovered that there was nothing in official society to restrict the police from painting the Mangrove a den of iniquity, driving the clientele away so as to restore their hegemony over the black community. Where official society failed to protect the Mangrove, the black community and our supporters would undertake that responsibility.

The Action Committee for the Defence of the Mangrove was formed, and in alliance with the Black Panther Movement, called a public demonstration of protest on August 9th 1970.

The following letter addressed to the Home Office, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the High Commissioners for Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, Barbados announced the march.

"We the Black People of London have called this demonstration in protest against police harassment which is being carried out against us, and which is condoned by the legal system. In particular, we are calling for an end to the persecution of the Mangrove Restaurant of 8, All Saints Road, a restaurant that serves the Black Community. These deliberate raids, harassments and provocations have been reported to the Home Office on many occasions. So too has the mounting list of grievances such as raids on West Indian parties, wedding receptions and other places where Black People lawfully gather.

We feel this protest is necessary as all other methods have failed to bring about any change in the manner the police have chosen to deal with black people. We shall continue to protest until Black People are treated with justice by the Police and Law Courts.

Signed

Anthony Mohipp
Barrister at Law
Action Committee for the
Defence of the Mangrove.

Polite but firm. Black power it certainly was, perhaps tinged with a little British constitutionality. The Action Group would mobilise blacks on the streets of Notting Hill in declared opposition to years of unbridled police power.

August 9th 1970:

Even the unpredictable British weather would come out in support of Black Power. Bright sunshine, tempered with the hint of a breeze. Just enough to draw a slight flutter from the flags, there to reveal the black panther uncoiled and ready to spring.

The crowd gathered, fitfully at first, before surrounding the first speaker who intoned from the make-shift platform — an abandoned vehicle parked immediately in front of the Mangrove.

"We have complained to the police about the police and nothing has been

done, we have complained to judges about judges and nothing has been done, we have complained to magistrates about magistrates and nothing has been done, we have complained to the council about the council and nothing has been done, now we have to do something ourselves".

It was a precise and correct political description of the stage reached by a movement which had, in the preceding fifteen years, probed, prodded and appealed to official society to offer some redress on the vexed question of police oppression in the black community.

And official society responded on that day. A menacing force of hundreds of uniformed police officers, outnumbering the demonstrators two to one, hovered in the background as the demonstrators set off in the mid afternoon, hemmed in by hundreds of police officers, meat wagons, panda cars, photographic equipment in tow. A remarkable mobilisation of state violence. "The pigs, the pigs, we have got to get rid of the pigs", chanted the crowd. They were on their way to pay visits to the three police stations which held the black community in that area in a state of seige. The flag of the Brixton based Black Panther Movement fluttered at the head of the demonstration, introducing a slight hint of the militancy. The placards were bold if a little un-

imaginative. 'Kill the Pigs', 'The Gun This Time', 'Hands off Black People' and Barbara Beese held a live pig's head aloft, an indication that perhaps decapitation might be a possible solution.

As we approached the Notting Dale police station, P.C. Pulley, against whom every nefarious deed, was alleged, was identified: 'Pully Must Go.'

Not one of us was unaware of an almost paralytic hostility coming from the hundreds of police officers who surrounded us on that day. During the last leg of our long march, finally to be completed at Harrow Road police station, the inevitable took place. The demonstration literally exploded. The violence was ferocious, as the combatants continued, for fifteen minutes, to batter, to wound and to maim each other. The police were moved to an orgy of violence and abuse. It was a street fight. Not one single officer entertained that much touted skill of crowd control. It was pure, unadulterated, unlicensed brutality. The niggers were to be beaten into the ground. How dare we, they seemed to be saying, take to the streets in opposition to them? We did not qualify. Anybody but a bunch of niggers. Crude though the language may be, the words fittingly described the reaction of the British state on that day.

We gave as good as we got. Bricks, stones, bottles, any ammunition at hand, we threw at the police. Whole building skips were emptied at them.



On the following day, and for a full week afterwards, the national and international press focussed on the demonstration. Apart from scattered, sympathetic responses, the press fed the British public a diet of worn out clichés about race relations, down right lies and political slander. Clearly identified were those black power agitators who had homed in on what they described as a simple and unsuspecting population. The Home Secretary called for an enquiry into Black Power and the 'Daily Mirror' of the 11th August announced that "Special Branch files on known agitators in the field of race relations are being studied by Commander John Gerrard who is in charge of the Public Disorder department in Scotland Yard".

It was the police who fed the press and politicians 'the black power agitators line' and they willingly fed at the trough. The political police were mobilised to present a report to the Home Secretary. Subsequent events would reveal that the police distorted the information that they had gathered. All talk about the police as an impartial body is sheer baloney. For the police knew that on that day, assembled on the streets of Notting Hill were the veterans of the fifties who marched alongside young blacks. The veterans would bring to the march the experiences of the dark days when Ossie paid the police to keep his gambling house open; when they stood helplessly while their homes and private functions were ravaged and violated by police officers; when they found themselves powerless to respond as Lennard Waithe was kidnapped by police on a frame up charge of living off immoral earnings; when P.C Pulley ruled the roost; when only the favourites of the police were allowed to run sheebens and sell ganja. All history jelled that day. And the youths had their grievances too. They were being sussed left, right and centre no youth club was safe from police intruders. They were stopped and searched willy nilly at the whim of any racist officer now given licence under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

The truth of the matter was that a section of the British working class, distinguishable by the colour of our skins, had declared open rebellion against the British state. And the British state reacted in the same manner as they had done to generations of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English workers.

Detective Inspector Stockwell, shy and retiring, but with an obsessive eye for detail, was charged with the responsibility for debriefing every single officer who attended the march. All hinged on the quartet of police officers, Pulley,

Lewis, Reid and Rogers, (the heavy mob) who, throughout the march, spied on the demonstrators through the slits in a non descript van. Stockwell and his team toured the working class community in Portnall Road where the fight took place. They were attempting to solicit statements from residents that the violence at the demonstration terrorised them. It is important here to note that not one single black resident would cooperate. Later, they would inform us that they believed the action taken by demonstrators to be justified. A section of whites did cooperate and from them came only the most faint hearted admissions.

Stockwell's documentation, including photographs taken by the 'Daily Mirror's' photographer, were dutifully passed on to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Hitherto unknown by the black community, the DPP would now assume a power and importance in full view of the black community. Behind this obscure figure, hid an insidious political decision handed down from the Home Secretary. Those whom the official files deemed black agitators were extracted from the body of demonstrators and charged with indictments handed down from the DPP some eleven weeks later. The nine, all black, were charged with inciting members of the public to kill police officers, incitement to riot and causing an affray.

It was the whip of the counter revolution. Like their American counterparts, the British government would attempt to imprison those they deemed the political leaders and later dissipate the rebellious with a series of pacification measures.

The movement was tested now as it had never been before. We were faced with replying to Inspector Stockwell in the courts detail for detail, burdened as we were by the tendency among lawyers to compromise their clients. We had to match, with propaganda of our own, the vast machine which the British state would summon at its disposal. We had to combat the tendency of the British state to mobilise support among whites who belonged to the same social class as ourselves. We had to be on the alert for black middle class deals with state power.

There was much that we could draw on from our anti-colonial history to meet this challenge. Equally, the international arena was replete with revolutionary practice from which we could fashion a programme of activity. The loose alliance between the Action Group and the Black Panther Movement was

the vehicle through which we attempted to execute these historical tasks and transcend the whisper in the ear of authority approach. The defendants assumed a centrality in all these activities.

Althea Jones Lecointe was a PhD student, a leader of the Black Panther Movement and an offspring of the Trinidad lower middle classes; Rupert Boyce was disciplined by British Rail as a ticket collector; Barbara Beese, a born here taught at a primary school and cared for her son and her home; Carlyle Inniss worked when he could and was prepared to raise money by means not sanctioned by law; Geoffrey Millette sold his labour power on the market for the unskilled; Roddy Kentish, well into his thirties, freelanced as a motor mechanic; Rhodan Gordon gave as his discipline the pompous title, race relations research worker; Frank Critchlow, a small business man, provided the catalyst through which a whole range of historical needs and emotions would be expressed; the author worked as a journalist and had recently returned from participating in the revolt which all but toppled the Williams's regime in Trinidad.

On our side, actually and potentially, were the hundreds of thousands of West Indians educated by experience, word of mouth and the scores of Black Power leaflets which propagandised on this issue of police oppression; an Asian population with experiences of exploitation and oppression all their own, the white British working classes with their concerns brought on by successive governments since the second World War; and an international campaign drawing upon every inch of tradition from a long and troubled anti-colonial history. By the time the trial was scheduled to begin the issues were placed before Caribbean peoples, blacks and whites throughout the United Kingdom. Support poured in from the black movement in the United States. The black community, at a massive rally in Notting Hill, gave the nine defendants a terrific send off on the day before we were to appear at the Old Bailey.

With a successful campaign behind us, the legal side had to be of the first order. We amassed a crew of lawyers who had distinguished themselves in matters pertaining to civil liberties. They were part of the liberal tradition inside the British establishment and carried in their baggage the much touted liberal compromise. We were having none of the deals, the guilty pleas in return for soft sentences, the give and take between defence and prosecution, the under the table exchanges of information all of



Mangrove demonstration.
Photo: Horace Ova



which had plagued black defendants to date. We disabused the lawyers, at once, of any notion that they would be in charge of tactics and strategy during the trial. Those decisions would remain in the hands of defendants who were in tune with the mood of our political constituency. We were pre-

pared to take advice but final decisions would rest with the defendants. Two of the defendants chose to defend themselves thereby releasing a section of the defence from the strict rigours of legal procedure. The defendants would meet daily for a month before the trial organising what our evidence would be,

checking every detail of the prosecution's evidence. Very little was left to chance. In all of these preparations and during the trial itself we were strengthened by the unshakeable loyalty and support of one of the barristers who received his education from black proletarians in those cruel days when the movement was smothered by those who could not see beyond whispering in the ear of authority.

The trial began in October 1971 at the Old Bailey before Judge Clarke. He was notorious for his heavy sentencing and a right wing law and order approach to justice. Before a packed public gallery, we challenged for a jury of our peers, a black jury. Though this motion was not granted, the mere fact that we presented it at all served to establish that we were prepared to attack all the worn out and repressive bourgeois legal procedure. In motion after motion we raised the rights of the defendants for innumerable facilities. By the time the trial proper was scheduled to begin, we had amassed a bevy of black note-takers and a tape recorder of our own in the well of the court and had won the right to have at our disposal a list of potential jurors and their occupations. Demonstrators thronged the picket line outside the Old Bailey if only to remind the British state that we had focussed an international force on their judicial system. The feeling in the black community was electric. We had broken the stranglehold of lawyers on defendants and posed a powerful challenge to the legal system.

A jury of two blacks and 10 whites returned a majority of not guilty verdicts after 55 days, and when faced with sentencing the guilty on the minor charges, the heavy handed judge was reduced to a whimper. This was the Xmas season, he mumbled, and he was prepared to extend to those defendants who were found guilty a measure of goodwill. No one was sent to prison. It was an enormous victory. Weeks later, eleven jurors dined at the Mangrove restaurant to celebrate our victory. They were apologetic about the guilty verdicts and generally hostile to the police. The British state could not convince whites to join them. Racism as a basis for the division of the working class took a severe beating, particularly since our defence was based on the fact that the police were liars and should not be believed.

The final part of this article will appear in the February 1981 issue. The December issue is our annual cultural issue.



Eyes on the ball

Spheres of Existence - Selected Writings
by CLR James (Allison and Busby £4.95)
reviewed by Farrukh Dhondy

I read some books because they are fashionable, some because they are the latest product of a writer who has become an addiction, some to fill my intellectual cavities and some because they are indispensable to making sense of the world in the way that I have chosen. The works of CLR James, fashionable today when the populations of the Caribbean and their offshoots in Britain and America are looking to a new future, fall into all four categories.

I am grateful for the republication, through Allison and Busby, of 'The Black Jacobins', the issue of the third volume of selected writings and the availability of James' philosophical treatises on Hegel, Marx and Lenin, 'Notes On Dialectics'.

History plans coincidence. The writings of James are made available in the year in which Rodney is murdered by the shaky regime in Guyana, the year in which Grenada celebrates the first birthday of its change of state, a year in which the people of the Caribbean and Latin America are forced to revolt through economic and political bankruptcy of the various governments which call themselves 'socialist'. At the memorial held for Walter Rodney in London, James dedicated the autobiography he is at present working on to the memory of Walter. It will stand as a gesture, in James' eightieth year, to a continuing dedication to the development of socialist revolutionaries of and from the Caribbean, a tribute to James' place of origin.

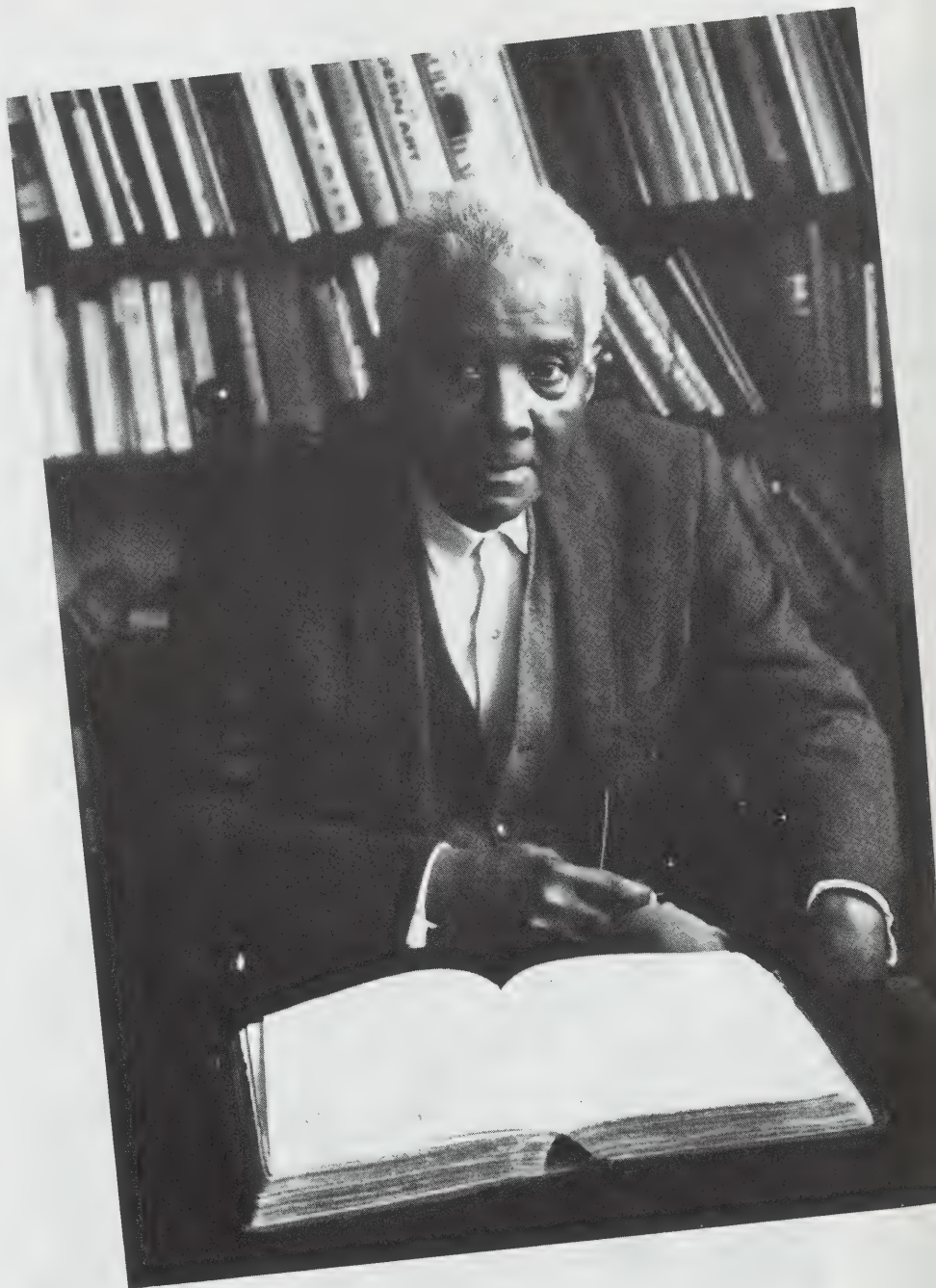
The work of James, taken as a whole, is dedicated to much more. He writes, unapologetically, in the tradition of Marx and Lenin. His subject matter is world history and the distillate of his thought is today offered to a world in which the working class and peasantry of places scattered over the globe face a fight for power and a crisis of direction. The regime of Maurice Bishop in Grenada, assuming power through a coup which brought the dissatisfaction of several sections of the population with Gairyism to its conclusion, finds itself hoist by its own petard. The revolutionaries have become Ministers in a state machine they inherited. The slogans of Caribbean reconstruction are replaced by orders and plans and propaganda from the ministries. Plus ça change, plus C'est la meme chose.

In Iran the regime of the Shah has been replaced by a new barbarism, a crisis of direction seeking solution through theocratic rigours with no promise of power or material advance for the workers

and peasants who made the insurrection in the name of Islam. In Afghanistan, Soviet imperialism has extended itself defensively to prop up a 'marxist' regime whose supporters are killing each other. Across the border in Central Asian USSR, the muslim populations, akin in several particulars to the peasants of Iran and Afghanistan, are restive under the Soviet yoke. In Eastern Europe the Polish government has promised striking workers more pay but no change in the relation between themselves, the work they do

and the government that makes them do it.

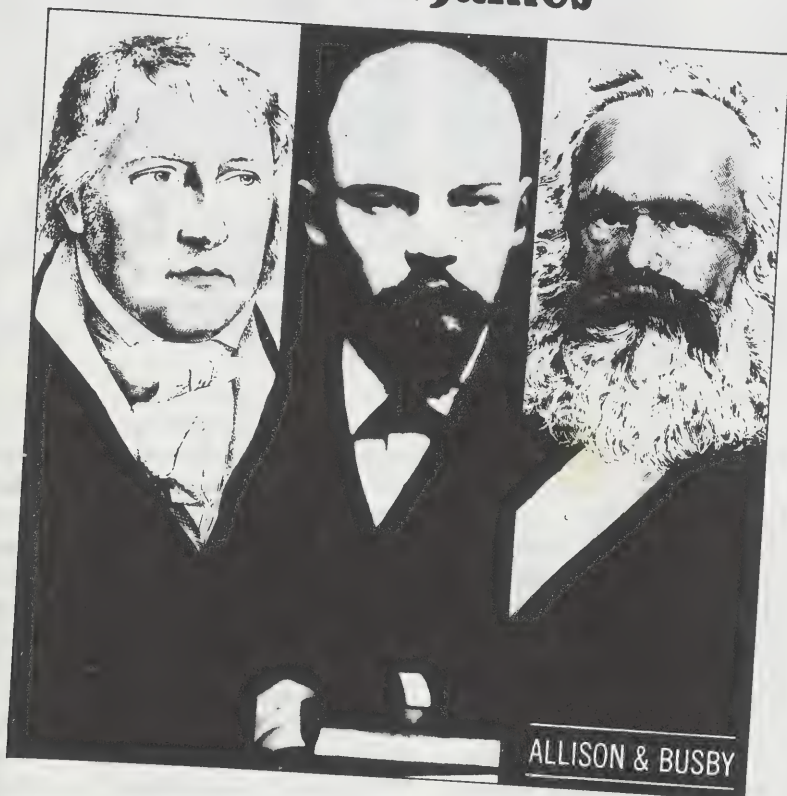
In Britain the workers refuse to deliver capital from its crisis by delivering productivity and accepting mass unemployment. The Thatcher government is faced only with the comfortable opposition of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions who retain their stranglehold over the working class and guide revolt into wage and productivity deals. The blacks and the Irish are the only section of this working class who threaten to break



NOTES ON DIALECTICS

HEGEL~MARX~LENIN

C.L.R. James



through that stranglehold and perhaps trigger off questions larger than 'who shall deliver the deal? Benn or Callaghan, Terry Duffy or Moss Evans'.

The enduring message of James' work is that the political technology of Lenin, the historical method of understanding propounded by Marx have nowhere in the world come into their own. James sets out to remind and reinterpret, instruct and inspire those who would understand the world to change it. In reading him we are back to magnificent simplicities, to the fundamental lessons that history teaches, to the complexities and unifying threads of class struggle and movement which help us make sense out of bewilderment.

The pieces in this third volume (a fourth is yet to be published) come from the years '27 to '70. The first two are short stories set in Trinidad. There are essays in literary criticism, speeches delivered in the course of a lifetime of practical political involvement, essays of appreciation for the work and place in

history of Paul Robeson and Learie Constantine and several seminal marxist writings which deal with the Russian revolution, the entry of the peasantry of the third world into the power struggle of our century, black power, its meaning and origins in the American working class and with the future of Africa.

The constant theme of the pieces is civilisation, emancipation, the spheres of existence which contribute to them. (The title, incidentally, is taken from T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets'. Through a twist of interpretation, James turns Eliot's spiritual deliberations on time into a dialectical statement from a marxist historian). This is no arid history, no dry marxist theorising. His interests and his style bring into focus the activity of the world's working classes at different periods in history. James looks into this activity, into what people are doing and thinking to measure the strides that civilisation makes through populations advancing to social order, democracy, the human

conquest of the environment.

A reading of the book can begin where the writer situates his own consciousness. In the piece on Black Power, delivered as a speech in London in '67 and devoted mainly to the emergence of Stokely Carmichael as an heir to the black revolutionary traditions, he tells us the genesis of his scientific premises: "I had studied Lenin in order to write *The Black Jacobins*, the analysis of a revolution for self-determination in a colonial territory. I had studied Lenin to be able to write my book on *World Revolution*. I had studied Lenin to be able to take part with George Padmore in his organisation that worked for the independence of all colonial territories, but particularly the territories of Africa."

The statement reflects James' modesty. The readings tell us that James has little to be modest about. He has produced unusual contributions to world writing. Not simply, as appreciations of the books in the bourgeois press have said, because his mind can range from cricket to a critique of Stalinism, but because James is one of a handful of writers since Marx who have kept their eyes on the dynamics of real societies in movement and have done it with a scientific and international perspective. His eye, to borrow a metaphor from cricket, has always been on the trajectory and bounce, the pace and spin of the ball.

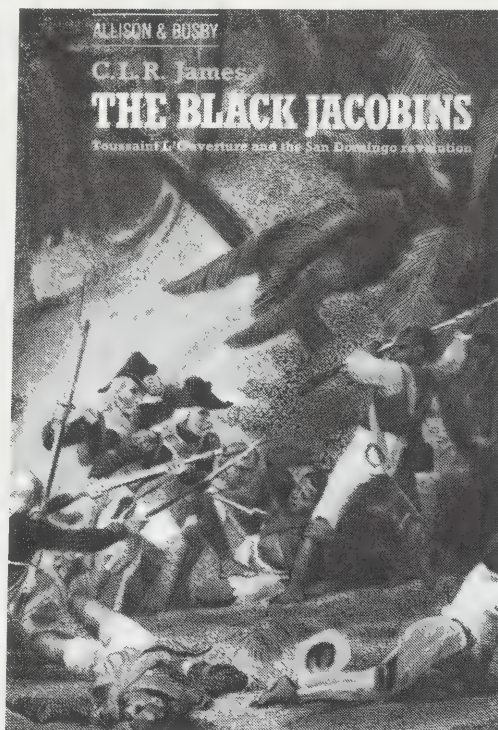
Let me try and state what these marxist essays are not: 'In the Poverty of Theory', E.P. Thompson considers the work of Althusser, Poulantzas, Balibar et al — the marxist philosophers who have found vogue in the '70s. He calls their work "unhistorical shit". He goes on to qualify the abuse: "In these days we are offered little else. They torture us on the rack of their interminable formulations until we are brought to the limits of endurance. We may not answer in any other language: only this one is rigorous and reputable. Above our heads, in the high academies, the inquisitors dispute; they fiercely disagree, but they recognise each other's complexity and repute. At last they extract from us a denial: a denial of human agency, creativity, a denial even of self. But as we rise from their theoretical racks, we see, through the window, the process of history going on."

Yes, there are formulations in James' work, of a wide theoretical nature. They are rigorous, reputable and accessible. They are the window through which the black movement in Britain and elsewhere must see the world, its human agency, its creativity, its estimation of the forces and people who have contributed to the emancipation of black people, of third

world people, of the peasantry and the working class in whose interests James writes. He is interested in the doings and the stages of development of the proletarians of the first world, from the recalcitrant producers of Detroit to the crushed revolutionaries of Hungary, of the African and third world masses, their movement from colonialism to full-fledged economic and democratic revolution.

I do not mean to imply that James' work dodges the concepts, even the abstract concepts of dialectics with which theoretical additions and expositions of Hegel and Marx and Lenin are forced to proceed. He grapples with them and expounds the logic with rigour and fervour, especially in 'Notes on Dialects' (a far from easy book to read), but without the colourlessness that characterises the work of say, Althusser, Balibar and Poulantzas. Theirs is a science without substance, a play of concepts which abstracts itself into a drama and structural stultification of ghostly abstracts.

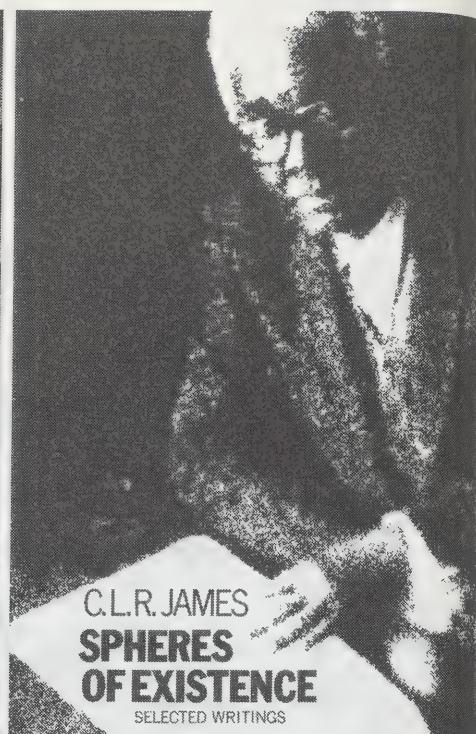
Compare, to take one of a thousand instances, the way in which Poulantzas and James deal with the subject of Bureaucracy. Here we see Poulantzas juggling the determinates of his equation: "Constituting the bureaucracy into a social force depends on the conjuncture, e.g. on the state's role (dominant or not) in the ensemble of instances. This was the case for instance in Germany in particular, and to a lesser extent in France, at the time when the bureaucracy was a social force in the general framework of the dominant role which has often devolved on the state. It also depends on the concrete situation of the class struggle: e.g. the above-mentioned situations of a general equilibrium of forces, and especially those of a catastrophe-equilibrium, operating in the framework of a capitalist state, create conditions favourable for the constitution of the bureaucracy as a social force. The same is true for the particular political disorganisation of the dominant classes (e.g. crisis of party representation in the political scene) whether or not combined with situations of equilibrium, or for the case of the constitution of classes of the small-scale producers, of the peasants, and in particular the small-holding peasants, and of the petty bourgeoisie into social forces: in this latter case the bureaucracy raises itself into a social force by functioning as the political 'representative' of these classes; and the same again is true for the case of the general crisis of legitimacy in a formation. . . ." I choose the passage because it is, as far as this reader is concerned, one in which I can make out the



shadow of what the man is saying; and also because what he is trying to say has the same elements in it of what James says in his assessment of Trotsky:

"Failing to base himself in the alienation of labour in the process of production, Trotsky fails to see the consequences of this upon the bureaucracy itself. Of what theoretical validity is his constant emphasis upon the incompetence of the bureaucracy? The Soviet bureaucracy is a reflection of the law of motion of the Soviet economy. The bureaucracy has no free will. It consumes more than the proletariat. But its social life within itself is a form of jungle existence. No member of the bureaucracy, except perhaps Stalin, knows whether tomorrow his whole life may not be cut short and he himself and all his family, friends and assistants disgraced, murdered or sent into exile. The various strata of the bureaucracy address each other in the same tone and manner as the bureaucracy as a whole addresses the proletariat. If the proletariat is imprisoned in the factories, the members of the ruling party are subjected to a regimentation and unceasing surveillance and inquisition that make the coveted membership of the party a form of imprisonment. . ."

The vague and almost mathematical allusion Poulantzas makes to historical example demonstrates a contempt which he and his ilk have for the reader, the truth and for the marxist method. James, eye on the ball again, doesn't want to feed the definition of bureaucracy through some computer which tests philosophical equations. His paragraph is, rather, anxious that the reader understands, through a



concrete example, in refutation of the respected work of living influence (Trotsky's), that a particular dialectic created a particular bureaucracy and the factors that created it contribute to its nature and self-movement. I like reading that and learning from it, from its method and from its interplay between the abstract and the actual.

My contention is that James' marxism-leninism (he always uses the lower case for both isms, though not for the proper names) never dissociates itself from the consciousness it has sought to engender, these last sixty (odd) years in the minds of revolutionaries and general readers. If one has to learn systematically from him, as this review is dedicated to demonstrating we must, then it is necessary to isolate from the selected writings his stated founding assumptions. Here goes. James begins with the assertion that "The October Revolution of 1917 was the initial landmark on the landscape of war and revolution, mass initiative and class repressions, self-liberating efforts and alienating mystifications. A breaking point in human existence began in 1917 and now awaits resolution." From an essay *Peasants and Workers*, published first in 1971, he continues: "Today there has emerged a new force to join the proletariat, comprising hundreds of millions. This force is engaged in the struggle to rid contemporary society of the incubus which weighs upon it and which threatens to destroy mankind itself by fratricidal struggles for power. This force is the people of the Third World, whose liberation is possible only by the destruction of the economic and cultural domination of

imperialism. . . " That is a second founding assumption.

The essay is a resumé of the activities of workers and peasants towards the destined socialist revolution and spans the lessons to be learnt from ancient Rome, from the English revolution of yeoman farmers, the French revolution, decolonisation in Africa, India, China. This essay taken together with three others: 'After Hitler Our Turn', 'After Ten Years', and 'Dialectical Materialism and the Fate Of Humanity', makes clear another dedication of James' marxism: "Clear and distinct ideas must be the basis of any socialist society. . . social economic reconstruction is the true a priori, the sole a priori of all revolution for the twentieth century". Within that framework of dedication, these four central essays in the book aim to clear up the confusion that reigns in theoretical debate over "marxism", stalinism, trotskyism and "the bewildering profundities of Chairman Mao". Such a reordering of thought is necessary in a world in which new post-revolutionary Caribbean republics (to take but one example) inevitably lean towards Moscow because their left wing rhetoric has bred an anti-monopoly expectation in their populations and because they put the acquisition of money from Libya or wherever else before the task of breaking up the colonial state which they inherit.

In particular, that is what James is saying. We cannot have a new order without the revolutionary dissolution of the old — and he proceeds to prove that stalinism is a vicious and barbaric reinforcement of the old, that trotskyism falls short in its understanding of the relations between the workers and the state, of workers and the processes of production when it concentrates on distributing the fruits rather than undoing the roots of Soviet wealth-making.

The rejection by James of Trotskyism is, for me at least, an important step in the black revolutionary history of our times. Here is a man, born in the Caribbean, bred in the styles and with the education meted out by the colonial masters to the uniformed meritocracies of the colonies, who turns writer and revolutionary, joins the Pan-Africanist movement, becomes a fully dedicated communist, lives through, actively, the era in which India was in ferment against the imperialist, lives with, observes, writes about, leads the groups and parties which emerge in America and the Caribbean in the post war period, and dedicates his actions (though never restricting his thought to) the independent movements of black people in our century. His shadow falls over and eclipses the 'marx-

ists' who V.S. Naipaul would label the 'mimic men', the dictionary-eaters of and from the third world who base their philosophies on some small and particular ghettoisation of trotskist, maoist or, Jah help us, even Althusserian formulation.

No. In James we have one of the thinking personalities to make an internationalist assessment which incorporates a rejection of trotskyism. He asks himself what exactly happened in Russia in the period between 1905 and the thirties when the stalinist state became the opposite of what the Russian working class, through the insurrection of the Soviets and the genius of Lenin had set out to establish?

He answers the question in 'After Hitler Our Turn' and 'After Ten Years'. James' disagreement with Trotsky has been patronisingly treated as some quarrel or complaint against the fourth international about neglecting the 'black question'. Not so. James broke with Trotsky on a central disagreement about the nature of the Stalinist state. Trotsky once asked Shachtman "Does Shachtman wish to say, in relation to the USSR, that the state ownership of the means of production has become a brake upon development and that the extension of this form of property to other countries constitutes economic reaction?" James replies "Unhesitatingly yes". He takes up the argument with Trotsky in detail in his review of 'The Revolution Betrayed'. The essence of the argument is that the so called socialist states have not managed to alter the relationship between the proletariat and the determinates of how and when they produce.

In evidence James quotes, again and again, the last essays that Lenin wrote, notably the letters and speeches on the Workers and Peasants Inspection' and 'Better Fewer But Better'. Again and again James goes back to Lenin's hope that the party which has become the state will be replaced, balanced, healthily distorted, by the true revolutionary step of allowing the peasants and workers of Russia and the rest of the Soviet Union a completely devolved democracy. It would have freed Russia, we are reminded, from the barbarisms of the stalinist production plans, hatched by a secretariat, central committee, politburo and plenum. It will, in our world today, solve, at a stroke, the crisis of direction faced by the juntas that rule their populations with socialist pronouncements and hoaxes.

In 'After Hitler Our Turn', written in 1937, James outlines the process by which the Russian revolution was wrecked. There is no apologia in his assessment for exigencies and hostili-

ties that are often said to have 'caused' stalinism. For him the stalinist state is not a degenerate workers' regime or a transitional state towards socialism. James reiterates Marx's contention that civilisation is faced with 'socialism or barbarism'. He identifies Stalin and Hitler as their brutal ordering of society were the chief manifestations of barbarism in our time. The warning is timely. Since Stalin, apart from the successors to the Soviet State, the perpetrators of bombings and brutality on the peasants of South East Asia, the rise of a class of despots which dedicate themselves to the annihilation of the 'surplus' Indian peasantry, the coming and going of a savage like Idi Amin at the head of a contemporary African country, the apartheidists, the Islamic choppers of hands and revivers of secret police, have all desperately tried or are trying to suppress the aspiration and the movement of the peasants and workers of the world to the other conclusion.

In his writings this movement is given visibility and credible shape. James, as marxists must be, is a careful optimist. His unique insights, into the role of the peasantry in our century, the role of the anti-colonial movements in the path towards socialism, are sometimes fresh in their simplicity. Here's one of the statements from which I got the feeling "I always knew that, now why didn't I think it?" : "The Indian National struggles after World War I followed something of the path whereby the Russian intelligentsia went to the peasant mass a century before. The Indian leader Gandhi made his name and fame by emulating the life of the peasant and engaging in all kinds of activities which would capture the peasants' imagination. Even those who called themselves socialist in India would, by the late 1930s, attempt to carry the whole peasantry with them in the effort to expel the British." That is an objective summation of Gandhi's 'spiritualism', saintliness, weaving fad, opposition to machinery, salt marches etc. etc., placed by an alarmingly simple stroke of insight.

In making the judgement he has Tolstoy in mind. The political essays are dotted with 'literary' quotes and vice versa. In writing of Shakespeare he says: "Thought and feeling were always experienced in terms of nature, the physical responses of human beings and the elemental categories of life and labour. This is the basis of his incomparable vividness and facility of expression and the source of his universality." The literary criticism in the book is not substantial enough to make an oeuvre, but insightful enough to establish James

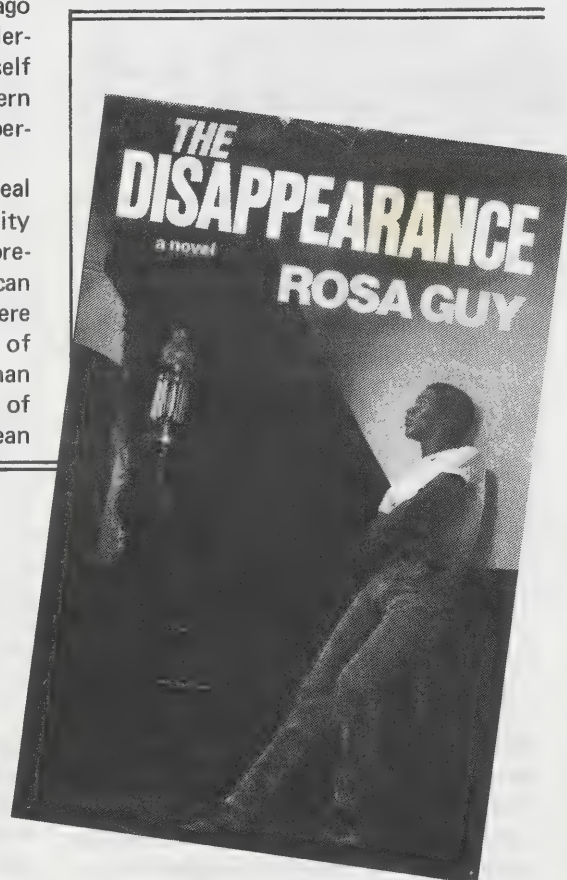
as an original commentator: He chooses, for a talk on the BBC in '63, the plays which have a black man and a jew. In discussing Iago James notes that Coleridge has used, of him, the phrase 'motiveless malignity'. James says "it is a phrase that has lasted and will last. It is magnificent, but it is not Shakespeare. As he usually does with an important character, Shakespeare, right at the start, makes Iago tell us the reason for his hatred. He should have been appointed second-in-command to Othello. . ." James goes on to quote Iago's speech about Cassio, the one in which he says "mere prattle without practice is all his soldiership."

And then "In the old days, says Iago, the man who was second was appointed when the senior post was vacant. But now all that is gone. Here too we must be on-guard against being misled by race. Iago is in the position of a man in an under-developed country who sees himself passed over for strangers with modern qualifications and modern ideas: I personally know the type well."

The remaining essays in the book deal with a diversity of subjects, a diversity which may possibly give rise to the prejudice that only the third world can today produce a renaissance man. There are appreciations of the work of Raymond Williams, an essay on Norman Mailer and another on the derivation of the style of Wilson Harris, the Caribbean

writer, from Heidegger and Jaspers and their existentialism. The essays are contentious, delightful and their range and thrust are bound to build in the reader a confidence and trust which 'unhistorical shit', on topics literary or political can never do.

In a letter to Stokely Carmichael, James says: "There are West Indians who have played a role on the world political stage that is not even properly understood by their own people." The volumes presently published ought to ensure that James is not one of those West Indians. Fame and respect he has. The growth of the 'black' movement (and initially I feel we must claim him) in the Caribbean, in Asia, in Africa, in Europe and America now, must ensure understanding.



Hairy

The Disappearance

by Rosa Guy

published by Victor Gollancz £4.50

reviewed by Akua Rugg

Novelist Rosa Guy is Trinidadian born but Harlem raised. This duality of background is reflected by her latest novel: 'The Disappearance'. Guy uses the contrasting vernacular speech and life styles of Afro Americans and West Indians like warp and weft to weave incident, dialogue and character into a dense, vivid tapestry depicting the lives of blacks in contemporary, urban America.

In this, her third novel to be published in Britain, Guy continues a theme present in the previous books: the attempt of adolescents to come to terms with a bewildering and menacing adult world. Writer that she is, Guy, in this novel, substantially varies this theme. She shifts

in emphasis from a girl's eye view of the world to a boy's, and the form of the novel is that of the thriller.

The book contains the classic ingredients associated with this genre: suspicion and suspense; the cracking of clues and codes; mounting terror and tension as events jigsaw inexorably into place culminating in a startling and dramatic finale.

The locale of the story is the melting pot of New York, simmering in which, amongst others, are communities of Afro Americans and immigrants from the Caribbean. Things boil over when 15 year old Imamu, born John Jones, leaves his apartment in a stinking tenement block in Harlem and goes to live with a West

Indian family — the Aimsleys — who own a house in the "green smelling heaven" of Brooklyn.

"We must act right away," her mother said or else that poor boy will be taken away from the detention centre after the trial and be sent to one of those places." It hadn't been until after her mother had made all the arrangements for the Aimsleys to be a foster family that Gail — and probably her father — had paused to wonder what was wrong with the boy going to "one of those places."

However, for Imamu, the transition from Harlem to Brooklyn proves to be not so much a safe deliverance as a leap from the frying pan into the fire.

Fingered in Harlem for murder, he is blamed in Brooklyn when a member of his foster family disappears. The "street dude" discovers that the attitudes to be found amongst blacks living in a suburb, one rung up from the ghetto, are no less dreadful in consequence for him, than the attitudes to be found in a downtown police station: "where a young black or Puerto Rican cat could be suffering from diarrhoea of the mouth, or dead, in half an hour."

With this book Guy's achievement is not merely to have devised an exciting mystery story, but to have raised, within the scope of a highly entertaining work of fiction, issues that are of interest to blacks concerned with struggle against oppression. The theme that blacks cannot 'buy' the power to determine their own destiny, but must fight for it, runs like a vein through the story. Imamu is hero of the book, not just because he solves the riddle of the disappearance of the book's title; he is also the only character in the book, seasoned by a life of deprivation and disadvantage, capable of questioning, analysing and resisting to any great effect, the oppression that shadows the lives of all the characters.

From beginning to end the book compels attention. Apart from arousing in the reader a desire to discover who 'dun' it, the author has created an irresistible and fascinating bunch of characters. These range from a precocious, toothless eight year old to a real West Indian 'tanty' who, with luscious looks, a sharp tongue and meddlesome ways, keeps her wide circle of acquaintance in a constant dizzying spin. Focussed though the story is through the experience of blacks, it nevertheless has universal appeal, touching, as it does, on aspects of common human experience — the passions generated by differences between people of age, sex, class and culture. The novel is charged with sex. Guy's subtle and witty treatment of this subject is not marred

by the least hint of sentimentality or sordidness. She uses humour throughout the book in an unerring, audacious and graceful manner to drive points home without in any way diminishing the seriousness of the issues dealt with.

In the hands of a less talented writer, the subject matter of the book — the conditions of the lives of a specific group of blacks at a particular point in their history — could have been presented in the form of sociological reportage padded out with descriptive passages. Guy avoids this sterile formula by an imaginative and inventive approach to themes within the

novel. Her choosing to make the disappearance of a character central to the novel is a master stroke. This circumstance provides more than an intriguing core to the novel. It becomes a metaphor, brilliantly sustained, for the seemingly inexplicable and insoluble problems blacks have to contend with in American society. The cause and effect of the disappearance are plotted in such a way as to pinpoint and illuminate the cultural, social and political strengths and weaknesses of the blacks whose lives are recorded so faithfully and vivaciously in this book.

Paper Dragon

Mama Dragon
by Farrukh Dhondy
reviewed by Akua Rugg

'Mama Dragon' is the first play of Farrukh Dhondy, well known as a political journalist here and in his native India. He is also a teacher, political activist, author of short stories and a novel. Infuriatingly and disappointingly, the play in no way fulfills the promise of its author's background. Artistically and politically, it is as much a paper dragon as the 'Mama Dragon' of the plays title — a military machine which proves to be a potential danger to its would be users and, in the event, totally useless.

The setting of the play is a government funded project meant to serve the needs of blacks in the ghetto. As the play progresses, the project becomes a microcosm of the political activity of blacks in Britain. Three distinct tendencies are revealed by the behaviour of the characters who people the project.

The black youth, who frequent the project, are shown in a state of rebellion against their parents and teachers and subjected to police surveillance and harassment. In control of the project is a meddling, mediating black 'miss' trying to contain the rebelliousness of the youth by diverting their frustration into harmless, cultural activities. Her leadership qualities are expressed in her organisation of the bureaucracy necessary for begging handouts from the state. The unexpected appearance at the project of Frankie, a black renegade from the British army of occupation in Ireland, bearing weaponry he has liberated, indicates the possibility of a black insurrection.

The play purports to deal with matters of great moment and makes reference to stirring events. Posters decorating the set describe the radical and revolutionary activities of blacks here and in the States the names of Mao Tse Tung, C L R

James et al are invoked to set the political tempo. Yet the play, in terms of structure of plot, dialogue and characterisation, displays inertia of imagination and ideas, an ignorance of what makes a play vibrant and interesting and an ineptitude of theatrical techniques. The plot is pedestrian, the dialogue arch and pedantic rather than witty or profound; the characters, mere caricatures.

The play as a whole lacks dramatic tension, which only appears, after a sort, when it is learned that the National Front propose to march through the environs of the project. There is nothing in the development of characters before this event to persuade the audience to suspend the disbelief that the people passing through the space and time of the play would be galvanised by the appearance at their window of the unacceptable face of the racist body politic. The youth, we only see organising socially and culturally around their daily experience of racist oppression. The project leader merely talks about organising against this oppression, (there is talk about a legal defence committee for one of the youths) when she's not swanning off to restaurants with her white lover and complaining of black men's inhumanity to black women. Frankie, the fighting man, despite his tough talking image, does not inspire confidence, checking out, as he does, the local talent rather than the security of his arsenal.

The flurry of activity around the NF march is derisory. The youth pathetically collect bottles as missiles for all the world like kids amassing milk bottle tops for some charitable purpose.

The project leaders turn from writing applications for Arts Council grants to drafting mobilising leaflets against the fascists. Frankie, up to now built up as a

man seasoned and tempered by the discipline of a modern technological army, turns into a parody of a Kamikazi pilot with his schemes to take on the military might of the state armed with mama dragon — an antiquated hand held flame thrower (the manual for which has gone missing), the A-Z and his cousin, an arty farty intellectual. The undeniable impression given by this turn of events is that political organisation of blacks at this moment in time is a joke and a bad one at that.

None of the characters command our sympathy let alone respect. They are shown sinking into and floundering about in a slough of incoherent ideologies and muddled methods of organisation and procedure. Farrukh puts his foot in it and wallows. Throughout the play, dialogue squelches as facetious jibes trying to pass for humour are directed indiscriminately

at all shades of race and political persuasion. Cynicism and superciliousness inform delineation of character rather sensitivity or acute observation of human nature and motivation. Black women are presented either as sentimentally romantic or as sleazy, shrill, scheming smart assed scrubbers, who when not actively subverting radical activity apply a brake on it. West Indian youth are shown as having rhythm and rhetoric and precious little else, whilst the Asian and white males seem effete in comparison to them. Such characters, coming from the pen of a writer with Farrukh's experiences, are a disgrace.

In political struggle, art and culture exist as fronts. An author who writes a play with the political content of 'Mama Dragon' situates himself at that front. If, as one of the characters in the play mentions, mama dragon, the flame thrower, represents a recruiting agent to a particular kind of struggle, whom is the play recruiting and for what?

If the play is intended as instruction for the uninitiated, then these will receive a relentlessly frivolous and distorted view of the intervention and contribution of blacks to British politics. Only our weaknesses appear in this production. Our strengths — the establishment and consolidation of independent, radical and revolutionary institutions — are conspicuous by their absence from this work of Farrukh's. As a black politico and writer, if 'Mama Dragon' represents an artistic distillation of Farrukh's experiences then, he has chosen, with a lack of good faith, honesty, authenticity and generosity the worst and not the best of what he knows to be the activities pursued by Asians, their comrades from the West Indian community and their allies from amongst whites.

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Edited by Darcus Howe and Linton Kwesi Johnson

80p

Some Thoughts on Reggae

By Linton Kwesi Johnson

CHUNI



A Short Story

By Janice Shinebourne

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Race Today* is titled 'The Race Today Review, 1980'. Within, we publish a short story and poems, we review political tracts, novels, the works of poets, musicians, playwrights and film makers. The selection is discriminatory, as we aim to bring to our readership, in small measure, the range and depth of creative activities which flow from the terrain on which we do political battle.

This body of artistic and creative work, most of which has been published in 1980, is forged in the heat of the confrontation between the new society in the making and its suffocating and increasingly murderous opposite.

We have identified two political tracts as standing at the frontiers of this confrontation. E.P. Thompson's **Writing by Candlelight** is a meticulous attempt at tracing the tendency in the modern state to whittle away the rights which British citizens have won over the centuries. Nowhere is this tendency as developed as it is in Northern Ireland where the British state has clawed huge chunks from the already minimal freedoms enjoyed by Irish Catholics.

Only the grotesque presence of Saracens and of all sizes and shapes of military hardware is able to maintain the shaky colonial/capitalist relations of production against which Catholic workers and unemployed so heroically struggle. The catalogue of barbarism is incomplete without a mention of the brutal torture which is the hallmark of institutions like Castlereagh prison. The OBE, or some such decoration, awaits the most twisted mind, the most degenerate and brutal reactionary.

And Eamonn McCann, says our reviewer, chronicles this epic struggle with imagination, careful observation, intuition and a profound grasp of reality in his book, **War and an Irish Town**. Only the most short sighted of political pundits would blind themselves to the fact that the Irish struggle will in time be the source through which all social relations in British society are transformed. The similarities between

Derry and Moss Side, between Belfast and Brixton, are too pressing to be ignored.

Both Thompson's work and McCann's documentation are required reading for revolutionary political activists everywhere.

The short story, *Chuni*, is written by the little known Guyanese writer, Janice Shinebourne. *Chuni* is a worker on the campus of the University of Guyana who is driven to the most cruel and destructive acts against his comrades. It is a destructive urge which is encouraged and fostered by a Guyanese bureaucracy which steamrolls its weary way over the mass of Guyanese workers and peasants.

And running through the novels, the poems, the lyrics of our musicians are the reactions and responses of ordinary working people to their suffocating and murderous opposites.

Toni Morrison evokes, in fine rhetoric, the lives of the black women in the small towns of Ohio, USA. They are broken in youth, they edge into life by the back door, they defy all and cower to none, they make accommodations to the brutalities of white American power. Michael Thelwell is ponderous in his recall of Rhygin, the famous Jamaican gunman of the 50's. Earl Lovelace is philosophically sound and historically accurate as he weaves his way through the lives of the little people on the Hill, a working class suburb of Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Our poets and short story writers draw images of the "grief we di people dem a feel", about the death of Walter Rodney, about our broken dreams and pains of exile, about the debilitating poverty of Asian workers and peasants.

And Linton Johnson stands on the bass line plucking a collage of Caribbean sound in tune with the rhythm of Caribbean rebellion in this last great battle of the West.

Darcus Howe
December, 1980.

CHUNI

A SHORT STORY
BY JANICE SHINEBOURNE

"Hi Bronson, gi' me a light," Chuni demanded.

Bronson flicked open the lighter and held up the flame. Chuni lit his cigarette, but his attention was drawn by June Perry and Eileen Veersammy as they approached the Arts Faculty.

"Gawd," Chuni muttered between puffs, "Miss Perry too sweet, like a ripe cherry." When the women drew near, he chanted, "Morning Miss Perry!"

"Morning Chuni," June Perry returned lightly, not breaking the rhythm of her progress.

When the women turned the corner, Chuni laughed; a mocking, strangled laughter, then he switched his expression from mirth to hostility, and declared, "These damn women believe they is the Virgin Mary."

Bronson sucked his teeth in disgust. "Chuni, you mad," he commented. "Why you don't leave the people alone? They 'in do you nothing."

Chuni slapped Bronson's shoulder. "I say they do me anything? I only tell them 'Morning'. It against the law?"

Bronson insisted, "Is the way you say 'Morning'!"

Chuni sucked his teeth in annoyance. He berated Bronson: "What the hell wrong with how I does say 'Morning'? 'Morning' from one man different from 'Morning' from another man? You think you is Jesus come from Heaven to save woman? Look, Bronson, them women t'ink university work mek them Holy! If I lick them foot-bottom it won' satisfy them, but if the Vice Chancellor spit 'pon them they would t'ink is baptism water. Who you t'ink you is anyway? Lord Protector of the University? Is trying you trying to tell me how to talk? Since when you become Officer in Charge of Protocol?"

Chuni's rhetoric used to amuse Bronson at first. After two months of it, he had had enough. It bored him now. Chuni had been with the university since its founding in 1963, Bronson just two months.

The university bus rolled in, stopped before the Arts Faculty, and deposited a stream of passengers: staff for the administration offices, library, the Arts and Science Faculties, maintenance staff (electricians, carpenters, plumbers), a trickle of day students, and a few lecturers. The cleaners queued for the return journey.

The campus was one year old. From 1963 to 1969, the university was housed in rented buildings in the city. In 1969, it was transferred to this site, twelve miles outside the city limits. Young trees, just a few feet high now, would grow tall later. The empty, flat stretches of land between the four main buildings were spread out generously across several acres. The buildings were modestly tall, glass and concrete ob-

longs lying on their sides. Viewed from the East Coast road, they shrank to minute proportions, sandwiched beneath the sky and the table of land. The strong breeze, wind, rain, heat, and blinding sunlight, had free play here. It was mostly deserted during the day. The students came at night. They filled up the rooms in the Arts and Science Faculties. The sheltered corridors, which connected the building, the cafeteria and the library, came to life with their talk and movement. The lighting system failed often, and this plunged whole areas into darkness and silence.

It was hoped that the campus would eventually house students' Halls of Residence, perhaps a Medical Faculty, Faculties of Engineering, Law, Education, and Business Administration. Pro-

perty dealers now owned some of the grassy, untamed land which bounded the campus. The hope was that a university town would bloom, spawn new suburbs along the East Coast, and that these would suck in the city suburbs. New roads would connect the city with the university. Until then, cows grazed on the land, and village children sought and found adventure there.

"Look, Bottoms-Up Comin'," Chuni muttered, pointing to Mrs. Taylor as she locked her car.

Mrs. Taylor was Head of the typing pool. Chuni and Bronson were her "messengers" and "machinists". They distributed the university mail, and manned the photocopying and duplicating machines.

"Chuni, Bronson," Mrs. Taylor acknowledged them. Her tone was abrupt, her head held high.

Both men muttered in unison, "Morning Mrs. Taylor."

When they finished their cigarettes, Bronson declared, "Chuni time to work."

"Work me' backside," Chuni retorted, but stamped out his cigarette and followed Bronson.

Bronson disliked Chuni's thirst for attention, how he stood at the Arts Faculty building every morning, and made rude comments about the staff as they arrived. When Bronson joined the university, Chuni had taken him under his wing. He taught him all he knew about the university. Bronson was grateful; it helped. The pitfalls, as well as the opportunities to make a good impression, were everywhere, in equal measure. Discovering these through experience was hazardous; enemies could be picked up, face lost permanently.

It took Bronson time to find out that Chuni was a campus crank. People avoided him. His view of Chuni altered. While it did, he felt guilty. He could not really hold much against Chuni. Chuni was six years older, and more experienced, but he was a child at



heart. He needed Bronson. Bronson did not mind, but wanted him to become more independent. He could find him easier then.

They crossed the wide expanse of land between the library and the administration offices. They were last to clock in at the pool. Mrs. Taylor commented crisply, "Chuni and Bronson last as usual."

Half an hour later, Dr. Ambrose visited the typing pool. Chuni was posted behind the duplicator. He was rolling off stencils, turning the handle in a circular, repetitive motion.

"Morning doctor!" Chuni greeted Dr. Ambrose.

Dr. Ambrose smiled, "Morning Chuni."

Chuni declared loudly, "That is the great doctor himself. The Man, Dr. Ambrose, the greatest lecturer in science ever. The man is a Ph.d. Look it up in the big Oxford dictionary at the library. It stand for Doctor of Philosophy. Any donkey could get a B.A, B.Sc., M.A., or M.Sc., but Ph.d. is another story. Not any Tom, Dick or Harry could get that."

Chuni's outspokenness was normal. He was easily seized by fits of eloquence. His voice would rise like a miracle of nature above the machines as he proffered views on various subjects. It could be anything; whichever, his monologues flowed with bountiful assertions. He was an ardent Roman Catholic, and a Staff Union activist. Religious and political subjects took extra hold on his imagination. Dr. Ambrose was President of the Union, and Chuni held him in high regard. An especially poignant note came to his voice when he spoke of Dr. Ambrose.

Mrs. Taylor gave Chuni a cutting look before she rose to greet Dr. Ambrose. They shook hands, and sat down at her desk.

Chuni nudged Bronson, "Look, nex' t'ing you know, she goin' bow down an' lick the man foot-bottom." He raised his voice again, and addressed Dr. Ambrose. "What you say Dr. Ambrose?"

Dr. Ambrose turned to glance at Chuni. He murmured patiently, "Awright Chuni, awright," then returned his attention to Mrs. Taylor.

The typists exchanged looks of disgust. Chuni fixed them with a defiant look. Mrs. Taylor and Dr. Ambrose settled down once more.

Chuni insisted on claiming Dr. Ambrose's attention. "Dr. Ambrose, when we having a Staff Union meeting again?"

Dr. Ambrose turned to Chuni, and replied quickly, "Soon Chuni, soon."

Mrs. Taylor gave Chuni her most withering look.

Bronson cautioned Chuni, "Chuni, you don' see that Dr. Ambrose and Mrs. Taylor trying to concentrate? Shut y'u mouth!"

Chuni retorted, "You shut y'u face," and resumed his monologue on Dr. Ambrose's achievements. "Science is not an easy subject to study. I say, when you have brains you have brains. God gives it to some an' not to others. You ever hear the saying: 'Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.'? Well is the same with brains. Some men big but have no brains. Some men small but have big brains. But Dr.

Ambrose now, have a big size and a big brain in his head. Well what that is but a case of a man born great, with big brains? Many are called, but few are chosen. . ."

Dr. Ambrose was leaving. Chuni called after him, "See you later Doctor!"

"So long Chuni," Dr. Ambrose returned, not turning around.

"Nice chap," Chuni continued. "The man been to England, States, Canada, Africa, Germany, Russia. A traveller. I like how he does carry himself bad though. Some'a these people been to only one foreign country an' does come back he' as if they come back from Heaven. Earth itself don' be good enough fo' them after that. As fo' them that does go up the university in Jamaica, they does come back more foreigners than white people. An' them that does graduate from this scrawly university does be more confuse than befo' they come he'. But every single one'a them, whichever university they been, does walk 'bout the country as if they own it, drive car too big fo' the damn road, an' t'ink they married to the Virgin Mary. Look at Dr. Ambrose. Unlike them, he travel 'cross the world, meet Malcolm X, El'ridge Cleaver, Stokely, President Nyerere of Tanzania, an' writers an' poets from all over the world. He is Socialist, Black Power, Marxist and Nationalist. But yet, the man humble, caring, putting others before himself. Education give him humility. He learn to t'ink fo' himself. The rest'a them does buy an' sell other people ideas as if ideas is something you could buy an' sell like soap. . ."

Mrs. Taylor had known Chuni for seven years. She had learnt to tolerate him. She knew when to pull him up and when to leave him alone. She confronted him only when he posed a direct challenge to her authority. She interrupted him wearily, "Chuni, nex' thing we know, you going to enroll as student in the History Department and want to give us real lessons. . ."

Chuni pounced, "An' what so strange about that? The university was put here for people like me: the working class, the ordinary people. All kind ah scrawly skin people does come he' an' t'ink degree make them important overnight. Them that running the university does come he' only to backstab an' cut throat like Morgan pirates. This university 'in make no progress. Nobody don' remember what Dr. Bachan say. . ."

"Dr. Bachan no longer in power," Mrs. Taylor commented briefly.

"Power?" Chuni retorted. "What is power? Some people t'ink power is something you does use to keep down people. People like that don' know nothing 'bout power, so they never secure. The men who is really in power is men who does put power inside the people chest. Men like Castro, Nyerere, Mao, Che, an' Dr. Bachan an' Dr. Ambrose. To men like them, power an' freedom is the same. Other men could kill them, torture them, exile them, imprison them, but they don' get rid of them. Good men don' die, because from the time they open they mouth an' speak to the masses,

they put power in their heart, give power to the people. That is why these scamps afraid of them. Is not the men they afraid of, but something they don't understand: freedom. Once the people hear good men, look out, the gove'ment in trouble. . ."

Mrs. Taylor gritted her teeth. "Chuni, come here!" She ordered.

Chuni had worked himself up to a pitch of intensity. Now, Mrs. Taylor's voice, angry, without a trace of tolerance, brought him to his senses. He composed himself and approached her desk, hands behind his back, a look of feigned innocence on his face.

"Yes Mrs. Taylor?" His voice carried genuine inquiry.

"Chuni, how many times do I have to tell you not to talk politics in this office?" She rapped out her words. "That is one thing. The other thing: I have had to speak with you frequently about being so personal with the staff. Tell me, if everyone always expressing their political views, and taking their eyes and pass the lecturers, abusing them and abusing the students, how will any work get done? We are being paid to run this university smoothly, while the lecturers lecture and the students learn. Chuni, if we are always abusing our function, how will this institution survive? Chuni? Tell me."

Chuni pondered her question. "But Mrs. Taylor," he began, his voice mild, "I di'n' take my eyes an' pass Dr. Ambrose. I di'n' say I not here to help run the university. All I do is tell Dr. Ambrose 'Morning'. And I speak my views in order to create a friendly atmosphere. That is what freedom of speech does. I don't see how if I speak my mind, and say 'Morning' to the staff, that will stop work. Don't you believe in creating a friendly atmosphere at work Mrs. Taylor?"

Mrs. Taylor closed her eyes, as if shutting out Chuni would aid self-control. "Chuni, don't you dare talk down to me," she warned. "Just don't argue with me." She opened her eyes. "Just don't let me have to speak with you again for the rest of the day. There is a lot of work to do. Now go back to your post."

Chuni began to protest. "But Mrs. Taylor. . ."

Mrs. Taylor rose quickly, swept up a file, and left the room, straightening her skirt as she went, the file tucked under her arm. Chuni looked bereft. He was a short man. No part of him seemed fat-free. With his fists balled behind his back, his neck thrust forward in his effort to hold his head high, but the folds of his neck threatening to suck it back, he seemed, in Bronson's eyes, a forlorn, fat, frustrated, overgrown schoolboy. Chuni began to whistle. Bronson joined in.

II

Bronson disliked it when Mrs. Taylor and Chuni crossed swords. He was not a naive man. He accepted that people disliked each other. He thought it a good thing for people not to conceal their real feelings, but the amount of feeling which Chuni and Mrs. Taylor put into their conflicts upset him. When Bronson shared these thoughts with his wife, she dismissed

them. She told him that it was foolish to take it seriously; it was very normal for people to behave like this; it meant nothing; it happened all the time; people had a right to dislike each other. Bronson got comfort from this. It helped him to think that it was all just foolishness. He never had this problem when he was a security guard: a more difficult and dangerous job.

One day, Bronson asked Chuni, "You like this job?" It was their lunch break. They were sitting behind the Science Faculty building, facing the stretch of empty land there.

"Me? If I like this job?" Chuni asked.

"Yes. You."

Chuni weighed his reply. "You see me, if I had my way I would si' down 'pon me back step whole day min'in me birds man."

Chuni was a bird collector. He had a dozen birds, each kept in a separate birdcage, each cage covered with a black cloth. He met with other bird collectors every Friday afternoon in an open field near the East Coast railway line. They trained their birds to whistle. Competitions were held every month to decide whose birds whistled best. Chuni's birds were good whistlers.

This surprised Bronson, for when Chuni was angry he maltreated his birds, pelting their cages with anything not too large or heavy. Chuni also maltreated his wife. She was always out of sight when Bronson visited, but once, she came to the landing when he and Chuni were sitting on the steps. She was as fat as Chuni, but taller. She had long hair, green eyes and a mole on her nose. She was holding a white enamel ladle in her right hand, and had just stood there, staring at them for a long while. Irritated by her presence, Chuni had turned around, returned her stare, then told her she looked like the Statue of Liberty standing there like that, with a pot-spoon in her hand. Wordlessly, she had turned and retreated to the kitchen. Since then, whenever Chuni mentioned his wife to Bronson, he referred to her as "The Statue of Liberty".

Chuni enjoyed a reputation as a creator of nicknames. He got a chance to indulge his love of labels when the Staff Union sent around a directive, asking people to address each other, henceforth, as "Comrade". Chuni was at work in the typing pool when he received the directive. After reading it, he went directly to Mrs. Taylor. He held up the pink slip of paper, and asked her, "Comrade, what you think of this?" Mrs. Taylor had already read the directive; she did not reply. That day, Chuni found deep satisfaction in addressing everyone as "Comrade", including the Vice Chancellor.

Their friendship stretched out and Bronson gave up hope about its power to improve Chuni. All the time in the world spent with him, all the good influence expended on him, had no effect. Bronson grew sick with Chuni's increasingly bitter, black moods. Sometimes the slightest aggravation set him off. It could be his suspicion that there was a conspiracy plot against him in the Registry, his dissatisfaction with his wife,

or his birds letting him down at the whistling competitions. Chuni grew more and more unpredictable. He told Bronson once he did not know himself why he felt like a lunatic some days.

It was a time when the tide was turning for the workers. The campus bloomed with Maoists, Marxists, Communists, Nationalists, Black Power advocates, members of the Hindu and Muslim religious societies, the two main political parties, and societies for the encouragement of cultural links with India and Africa. The current government slogan was "The Small Man Is The Real Man".

Chuni cautioned Bronson not to believe that people cared about men like them; it was talk, a bandwagon; men did not find their conscience overnight; saying you were a Nationalist and Socialist nowadays was like buying a new car or a house: a status symbol; it was not to the advantage of men like themselves; it was only to the advantage of people looking for adventure and positions. Bronson, by way of reply, said he had been wrong to think all this time that Chuni was mad; he was not just mad, he was crazy.

Chuni's criticisms were soon made to sound hollow. The Union had fought a year long battle to abolish the ban on use of the Common Room by lower grade staff. The battle was won; the ban lifted. Wasn't that a sign of equality? Bronson asked Chuni; wasn't that a bloodless revolution; in which other country did that happen without people and police clashing, people being teargassed, bombs used, mounted police and dogs coming out to smash heads and draw blood?

The lifting of the ban allowed Chuni and Bronson to spend their lunch hour in the Common Room instead of sitting behind the Science Faculty building. The Common Room became a Union shrine. Human and liquid spirits flowed in large measure. But it did not last. Overconfidence led to oversight. The workers drank too much, and often, men turned up at work, drunk, in the middle of the morning. It led to a summons for a Committee of Inquiry to review the new arrangement in the Common Room. Once, for a short while, a shrine of freedom, the Common Room became a reminder of failure. Many lecturers had been driven away by the presence of the workers. For the women workers, the Common Room now carried a stigma as a place of drunkenness. Their numbers dropped until only a hard core of alcoholics and union activists graced the bar.

About this time, Chuni became infatuated with June Perry. He had always admired her. She was attractive, young, brilliant, and committed to the Union and radical politics. In the current crisis, she was one of those determined to brave the odds, and this made her saintly in Chuni's eyes. He displayed his worship in various ways, and she softened her early reserve and caution with him. She listened to his ravings with genuine sympathy.

June Perry's and Dr. Ambrose's spirits had not flagged with the tarnishing of the Common Room's image. They had led the battle to open it up. It was

a fragile victory in their efforts to rid the university of class privilege. There were larger battles to be fought: political and academic freedom for the lecturers, localizing and regionalizing the courses. Much stood in their way. Conservative elements dominated the committees, from the most powerful to the insignificant; even the Union was infiltrated; it was vital to hold and consolidate small gains. The Committee frequently summoned the couple to give evidence. Under these pressures, their hard-won victory slipping from their grasp, the workers' loss of spirit placing a heavier burden of responsibility, in addition to academic ones on their shoulders, the couple drew closer, and soon, could be seen constantly together, on and off the campus.

Chuni's inclinations swung like a pendulum. He viewed the couple's new-found relationship as his loss; their love as an abandonment and betrayal of his cause. It had the effect of damaging the mechanism which made him tick. In his hero-worship, he had wedded his spirit to theirs. Their absorption with each other divorced him from their lives. First, he oscillated. Some days, he was sure of his old liking for June Perry; some days he was sure he disliked her; some days he was ambivalent and confused, unable to make up his mind. His final solution was to disapprove openly of their relationship. He frequently said, "Miss Perry is a too nice cherry for an old boar like Dr. Ambrose."

One day in the Common Room, he expressed his disapproval in their presence. It was the lunch hour. June Perry and Dr. Ambrose were sitting together near the bar. Chuni was perched on a barstool. In between gulping down his beer, he shot them cold, hostile looks. Half-way through the hour, he claimed the crowd's attention, declaring he had wished to disclose he was writing a thesis. The crowd, ripe and ready for anarchistic humour, detecting its promise in Chuni's voice, baited him. Someone challenged him to declare the title of his thesis. "The habits of the boar and the habit of the cherry." he replied.

No one failed to grasp Chuni's allusion. His nickname for June Perry, "Perry the Cherry", was well known on the campus. Chuni held forth, for a long time, on the habits of boars, and the habit of the cherry. He concluded his thesis, "So I say, you can't put new cherry wine in old pigskin bag."

Bronson, disquieted, and feeling worry for the couple, decided to try to restore their pride. He declared, "The older the fiddle, the sweeter the tune."

Chuni fixed Bronson with a superior, offended glare, then retorted, "Who talking 'bout fiddle and tune? Look, like you looking for an argument Bronson?"

Bronson shrugged. "I can' argue with you Professor Chuni. Like you done do all the research."

Chuni, with a calculating glance in the couple's direction, weighed his reply. "I done do all the research yes. Field research. Behind the Science Fac-



ulty. Wednesday nights, ten o'clock sharp."

At that point, June Perry and Dr. Ambrose rose as one, and fled the Common Room, Chuni's strangled laughter chasing after them.

Chuni slapped Bronson's shoulder, howled with mirth, and hollered, "You green boy, you green. You los'!"

The incident marked the beginning of the end of Bronson's friendship with Chuni. Bronson had never contradicted Chuni like that, in public, taking the opposite position. Chuni refused to forgive him. They stopped spending their lunch hour together, or going to the cinema and rum shops together, and they stopped visiting each others' homes.

Bronson had not liked Chuni's dependence. Chuni had been like a stone round his neck. Now, Bronson was rid of him. But the break-up of their friendship complicated working conditions in the typing pool.

Mrs. Taylor's job was not easy. She had to supervise the smooth flow of paperwork between the administration, lecturers and typists. The flow downwards, to the typists, never slowed; it intensified. The flow upwards, to the administration offices and lecturers, was too slow. The typists felt exploited. They rebelled by sulking, throwing tantrums, and taking sick leave. Mrs. Taylor felt equally vulnerable. She dreaded disapproval from above. It undermined her confidence, security and auth-

ority. She held on tightly to the reins of discipline, and drove her charges.

Bronson discovered that, in getting rid of the burden of Chuni, he took on another. He came to see, with the wisdom of hindsight, how Chuni had served him, all this time, as a means of protection in the typing pool. In the daily current of veiled fears, anxieties and resentments, Chuni had willingly thrust himself to the center of the stage, creating and inviting confrontation, indulging and satisfying his craving for attention. Like an actor, he served as a vessel and medium of frustration. He was a bad actor. His repititious material and histrionics bored and exhausted his audience. Now, he retreated from the stage. The women's venom, more subtle than Chuni's, surfaced. Alerted, Mrs. Taylor sharpened her discipline.

Locked in the typing pool with them all, estranged from Chuni, Bronson felt Mrs. Taylor's full force. He began to understand Chuni's bitterness. He tried, once or twice, to stand up to Mrs. Taylor, but it did not work. It only made her view him with unconcealed suspicion and distrust. When he was sick, and requested time off, she questioned the truth of his illness. She treble-checked his work. With each passing week, he sank lower in her estimation. He became overeager to please her. She had a repertoire of stock responses which she kept for those with whom she thought free communication impossible or undesir-

able. "I finish the job Mrs. Taylor," from Bronson, would be greeted by her with "I hope so Bronson, I hope so," so much so, Chuni nicknamed him "Faith, Hope and Charity", stressing the second quality.

Chuni relished Bronson's suffering. Matters between them might have been worse were it not for Chuni's continuing obsession with June Perry and Dr. Ambrose. It granted Chuni's usual victims a reprieve. Bronson surmised that even Chuni's wife and birds were probably being spared.

At first, there were days when Chuni seemed not to notice Bronson's existence. Their estrangement lessened, and once more, warmth grew between them. Bronson began to think it might be possible to restore their friendship to its original strength, so when Chuni suggested a film at the Globe one afternoon, he consented. He was to regret it quickly. He found himself sitting in the balcony section, a few rows behind June Perry and Dr. Ambrose. Sitting there near Chuni, Bronson felt his old fear of him return. Bronson went to sleep in the middle of the first film. Chuni woke him when the last film was finished. The lights were coming on, the cinema emptying.

Chuni asked him, "Bronson, you want to see something that won't bore you?"

Bronson felt condemned to spend the rest of the evening with Chuni. With him in tow on the pillion of his motorcycle, he followed his directions to one of the city's suburbs.

They stopped before a large house. Instead of going to the front gate, Chuni led Bronson to the hedge, and before he could speak pushed him through a break.

"Chuni what the hell is this?" Bronson demanded. "You going to t'ief or something?"

"Ssh," Chuni cautioned, pointing to the house.

The streetlights were off. Only a few blocks of light from open windows lit the darkness. They were standing on the edge of a lawn, behind the house. Bronson turned to go, but Chuni held him fast, his hand like a vice round his wrist. Suddenly, footsteps sounded on the outer stairs.

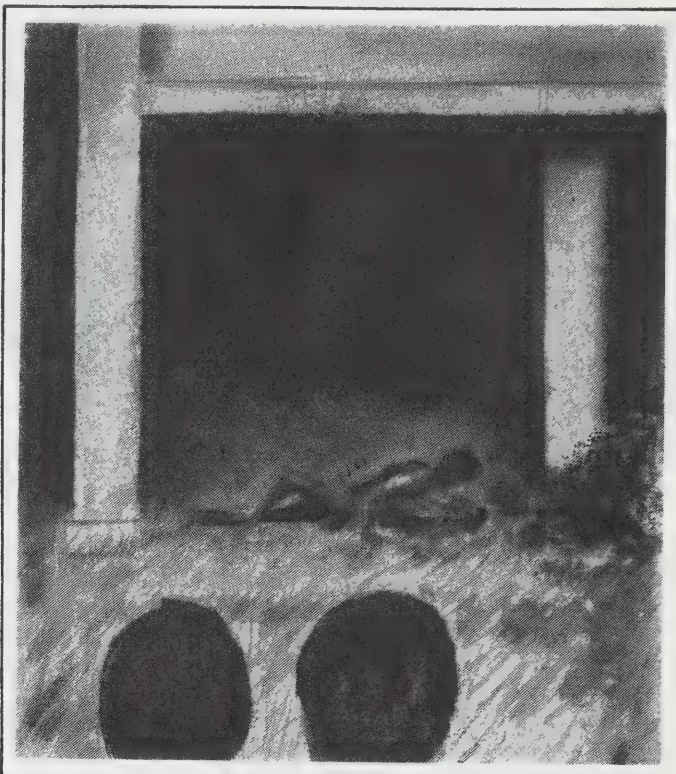
"Duck, duck!" Chuni whispered, pulling Bronson to the ground.

Low voices accompanied the footsteps. Bronson worked his wrist free from Chuni's grip, but stayed where he was, intending to leave as soon as it was clear. The voices murmured on. His eyes became accustomed to the darkness. He made out the cesspit, a few yards away. His eyes ached, his body was stiff with tension. Now, the voices ceased, and footsteps sounded, coming towards them. Then the footsteps ceased and the voices began again, closer this time, a man's and woman's.

Then Bronson saw them: they were vague shapes in the darkness, outlined against the trellis wall which ran around the stilts beneath the house. The two shapes merged and became one. The single shape swayed, then sank to the ground.

The couple's breathing, Chuni's, his own, were like

the ticking of separate clocks, each keeping a different time, sounding separate notes. Now stifled cries and grunts came from the couple.



Bronson turned to Chuni. "Wait, Chuni, you turn Peeping Tom?" He sucked his teeth and stood up. This disturbed the couple. Their noises ceased abruptly. He had a better view of the scene: the woman was lying on her back on the ground, the man was crouched over her. They must have seen him, for the woman's voice rose in a wail: "Oh Lord!" Bronson recognised it. It was June Perry's. Then the man shouted angrily: "Who's there? Who's there? Goddamit! Who's there?" It was Dr. Ambrose.

"Chuni you madman!" Bronson screamed, echoing Dr. Ambrose's outrage, and he began to kick Chuni where he lay on the ground. He kicked wildly, struck blindly. Chuni's voice seemed to come from far away, pleading with him.

Bronson could not hear. In the rage of his own injury, breath seemed to come solely from within his body. His violence sparked it. It filled him. It fed his lungs, heart and flesh. He could hear only his need for breath. It throbbed like drums in his head. The rhythm and noise was flesh, like a bloody, swollen, pumping heart; strong, but fragile, giving, but taking blood, before there could be life. The more he struck, the louder the noise grew. When the strength in his feet failed, he sat on Chuni and pumelled him with his fists. When the strength in his arms failed, he dropped exhausted beside Chuni's inert form.

The throbbing in his head slowed, then stopped. Lying on his back, he saw the sky. Above the dark night, it was a thin blue skin, wrapped over the flesh of the earth. Someone was standing over him. A voice called to him, "Bronson?" He could find no voice. His head was a shell, his feet and hands were sticks, his tongue gone, brain blank.

MUSIC

Some thoughts on Reggae by Linton Kwesi Johnson

You once wrote the following: "Since Bob Marley and the Wailers made the LP, 'Catch a Fire', what has happened is that a whole new style of Jamaican music has come into being. It has a different character, it's a different sound". Could you develop on that?

There, I was trying to outline the beginning of what I can only describe as International Reggae. It incorporates elements from popular music, internationally. Rock and soul, blues and funk. These elements facilitated a breakthrough on the international market. Where Bob Marley had tried and succeeded, others followed. Peter Tosh, Third World, Inner Circle being the most prominent. Reggae bands in this country have been inspired by that success. Take Aswad and Delroy Washington for example.

You see, the presence of a substantial Caribbean working class in Britain and the USA is the vehicle for the transmission of Jamaican music internationally.

Bob Marley, having himself spent sometime in Britain and the USA, was well placed to make the intervention, as he came under the heavy influence of metropolitan sounds. He was not contriving an international sound so to speak. He was creating out of the stock of musical experiences he had accumulated locally and internationally.

The attempts by other Jamaican based bands like Peter Tosh, Third World, Toots and the Maytalls, Inner Circle and the Mighty Diamonds to do the same thing have not been as successful. They have not been able to consolidate the

breakthrough that Bob Marley made, and they have made more compromises, in so far as contrivance has been quite prominent in their work. We now have a distinctive style of reggae music which, although dealing with themes which preoccupy Jamaican singers, expresses itself stylistically in a different kind of way.

You have spoken about the manner in which metropolitan sounds have influenced reggae. Does it not work the other way around?

Yes, it does. We have reached the stage where reggae music is increasingly being incorporated into blues, jazz, rock and soul music. Taj Mahal, Nina Simone, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, The Members, Elvis Costello are but a few of those whom reggae music has influenced. This means, of course, that International Reggae has taken its place alongside other internationally popular forms.

And furthermore, the young, British born blacks and whites, having imbibed reggae, its antecedents and metropolitan pop, are creating a syncretic form misleadingly referred to as 'Ska'. The Selectors, Specials, UB40, Bad Manners etc., are better known exponents of this tendency. The net could be cast further afield. Calypso and the Afro-beat have not escaped the reggae influence and from Ghana to Trinidad, Nigeria to Guadeloupe, the reggae beat pulsates in popular song.

You isolate 'Catch a Fire', Bob Marley's

album, as characteristic of this new and distinctive style of reggae music. What are the elements in this record which have driven you to that conclusion?

I think, firstly, the mix. Instead of concentrating exclusively on a kind of bottom, heavy sound, with the emphasis on drum and bass, as had been the case till then, you had, on this record, more of a 'toppy' mix, a lighter sound. The emphasis is not exclusively on drum and bass but more on the guitar and other fillers. Touches of keyboards and the introduction of the electric rock guitar. That was revolutionary. On no other Jamaican reggae recording, that I can remember, was such a clear cut attempt made to incorporate the modern, electronic sounds of metropolitan music: the mixing, the inputs of rock guitar, blues, and soul elements.

Are the results solely influenced by the discovery of new technology?

I think it was partly that discovery of new technology. Bob Marley could make his records for an internationally based recording company. He had available to him, studio facilities which were far better in equipment and administrative organisation than those which obtained in Jamaica. Available to him were more time and money to be spent on the end product, as it is referred to in the music business. But this was not all. I am sure that at the back of the minds of those involved, everybody, was perhaps the belief that the hard Jamaican sound, with the emphasis on the drum and the bass, would not be as accessible to the non-Jamaican listener as a lighter sounding production would be.

What is interesting is that other groups perceived the market differently. Burning Spear, the Gladiators, Gregory Isaacs, Yabby U, Dillinger, I Roy and others entered the international arena without incorporating other elements into their music. Both the Gladiators and the Mighty Diamonds made compromises, but at their record company's insistence, not theirs.

By defining International Reggae, you make a clear distinction between that and another kind of reggae. What is this other reggae?

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between the two, Local Reggae and International Reggae, is the fact that one kind of music is being produced with a local audience in mind, and the other, with an international one in mind.

Local Reggae, the home grown reggae that is, is basically native to Jamaica. Its origins lie in the period when Jamaican musicians were literally imitating Rhythm and Blues and swing. Out of this, the Ska beat evolved as our first national form. Ska incorporated national folk and religious forms like the Nyabingi music, mento and the Christian church influence. The latter, the church influence, is very predominant in Jamaican music. Eventually, these origins evolved into rock steady and after that into reggae.

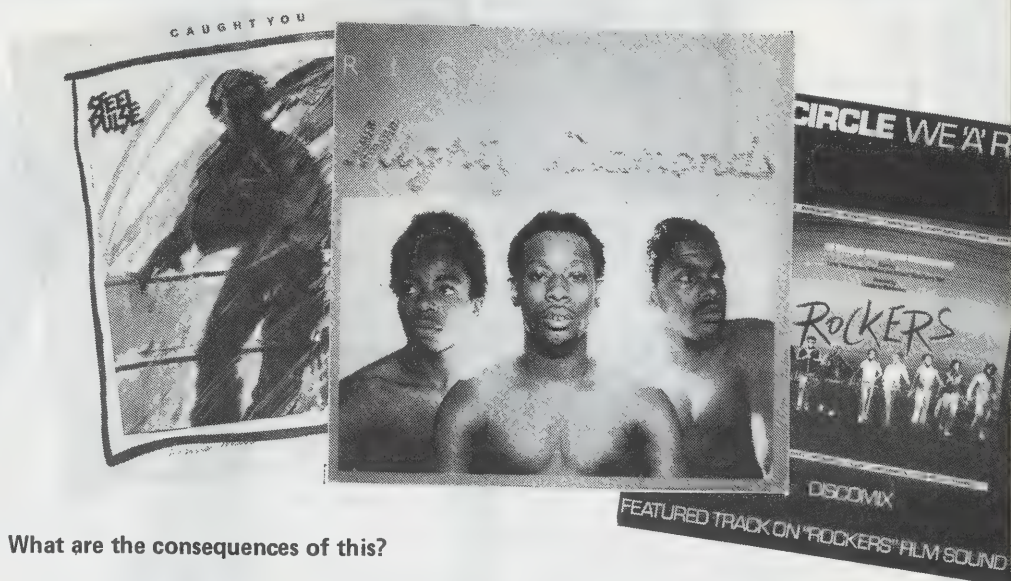
Local Reggae incorporates the rhythms and the beat of Kingston, Jamaica, expressing the sentiments and the struggles of the working people and the unemployed. The language is faithful to that used by urban working class Jamaicans.

There exists the recurring criticism that most of the lyrics in current reggae songs, (and one includes some of Marley's lyrics as well), are boring and repetitive. What is your view?

I wouldn't include Bob in that you know. Because even though Bob keeps saying the same things over and over again, in so far as he is consistent with the particular themes about Africa and so on, he says them in new ways. Also Bob has been projected as the figurehead of the Rastafarian themes. He has realised that his market is much wider, and therefore deals with themes which take a much more universal character. Like love, which is everyday. Whether you come from Brazil, Trinidad or Iceland, you can relate to it.

Then again, when he does sing about repatriation is a must, that we must all go back to Africa, he approaches these positions with different metaphors, different lyrics and so on.

But as far as the others are concerned, they see the image projected by Marley, the Rasta image, the dreadlock image, attracting a wider audience. Bob's success, in the main, and the lesser though important successes of others, made the image an attraction. Others latched on to it and fell into what I describe as the Rasta trap.



What are the consequences of this?

There is a contradiction in what they are trying to do. Although they are trying to internationalise the music, in order to bring it to a wider audience, they are still preoccupied with local themes. So you might have a rock guitar, a loud, wailing, rock guitar, making a plea for repatriation to Africa. It seems to me that the two don't go together.

Do sound systems which play at working class parties and dances in Jamaica play Bob Marley as he is religiously played and supported in, let's say, Sweden, Britain and America?

No, I don't think so. I think, perhaps, he is played more so uptown, than downtown, Kingston. Uptown, from cross-roads upwards, is where the better off live. Remember though that he is very much a folk hero in Jamaica amongst the working class, particularly the unemployed ghetto youth, as he has shown his concern for and loyalty to them. But he would not get played as often as a DJ like General Echo or Prince Madu or one of these up and coming youngsters.

There are several British reggae groups on the scene at present. Have they managed to add anything new to the music?

Yes, they have. We are talking about groups like Aswad, Matumbi, Steel Pulse, Tradition, Black Slate, Movement, Misty and a host of others. There are some individual singers like Janet Kay, Sonia, Cassandra and other talented artists. These have brought a new feel to bear on the music. Feel is very difficult to define, because it is emotive, it is abstract. What I am trying to say is that the kind of reggae that we produce here in Britain is informed by different tensions. The tempo of life is different. Those who make records in Britain for the most part

are either born or grew up here. They have therefore been exposed to a much wider variety of international sounds, and must have been influenced by them, even though many would not admit it. In turn, we have influenced, from time, popular, metropolitan music and continue to do so today.

Where as say, ten years ago, artists here were still trying to imitate and cover Jamaican sounds, now they seem to have a new confidence, and are creating out of their own experiences. But for this Rasta trap we could have gone much further.

For many youngsters in Britain, particularly the unemployed and working youth, who supply most of the musicians, the discovery of Rasta is like a spiritual awakening. It opens up the creative potential and the creative possibilities of this section of our community. They seem, in the main, to have been stuck there. Aswad, for example, plays some of the finest stylised reggae that you will hear around. Lyrically, they do not seem to be dealing with things which I feel they should be focussing on. The closest we have ever got is the record, 'Sticksman', by Black Slate. It describes how the unemployed youth make a living. Then we had 'The Streets of Ladbroke Grove' by Delroy Washington. Oh yes, the best example, in dealing with our own situation, is called, 'Don't Call me no Immigrant', by Tubby Cat Kelly.

What about female singers?

There are more female singers here than in Jamaica. For the most part, they are indistinguishable. They all sound alike. Their voices lack the power, depth and range of black American female singers.

continued on page 61

LINTON

KWESI

JOHNSON

FORCES OF VICTORY



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BASS CULTURE



ILPS 9605

LKJ IN DUB



ILPS 9650

AVAILABLE ON CASSETTE



Where do these British groups entertain?

Well, their audience are the general music punters, really. Black and white. They play at black community venues — small clubs, youth centres and so on. They play on the university circuits and the normal club circuits. Any of these bands could be heard at college gigs, at the Venue, a popular up market night club, so too at the Music Machine, the Marquee, Tiffanys etc.

Have you any idea of the higher bracket record sales of these groups?

Steel Pulse, before the group changed, notched up something like 100,000 on their first album. They distinguished themselves with lyrics about the blacks in Birmingham. I think their sales have suffered since the group got rid of their former lead singer because he was married to a white woman. Even though the music has progressed, the lyrics have lapsed into black nationalism — constant repetition of black nationalist clichés.

What then would you describe as our inheritance?

What we have is an established tradition, the reggae tradition, with a variety of styles and forms to draw from. Ska, chucky, skank, rockers, rock steady etc. What has emerged is a distinctive style of what is known as 'lovers rock', a Jamaican form, which has been integrated in the popular love music of British artists — Black Harmony, Louisa Mark etc.

Tell me, have we yet broken out of the primitive exploitation of reggae musicians as seen in the film, *The Harder They Come*?

No we haven't. It is not as prevalent as it used to be. Now that artists recognise that they can make records themselves, and put them out without too much bother, and that the larger companies like Island, CBS etc are interested in marketing our products, then we are in a better position to get a fairer share of the cake. However, a lot of these small labels haven't been able to survive the financial constraints the government has put on the country as a whole. There were quite a few of these independent, small, black labels around, and I think maybe three quarters of them have now disappeared.

Turning to your own music, you appear to have incorporated several strands of Caribbean music into your work. Could you describe them?

Folk forms, religious forms, Calypso, soul, jazz just come out in my poetry, really. 'Forces of Victory', for example, was a poem which celebrated the theme which Race Today Renegades played at Carnival 1978. It was simply a celebration of our theme. It was informed by Calypso beats and rhythms. Most reviewers missed the fact that it was informed by that. The same goes for the poem, 'Man Free', about Darcus Howe. Between the lines "Darcus Outta Jail" and "Race Today Cannot Fail", is the beat of a steel band. That is what I heard.

'Inglan is a Bitch' is a ballad. 'Lorraine' is informed by soul. It is the mood of the poem, the atmosphere and the feel I am trying to invoke, which recall certain traditions.

Would you describe your work as falling within the tradition of International Reggae?

Yes, it couldn't be placed anywhere else, because it was made in England by musicians who spent most of their lives here. It is preoccupied with themes arising out of the black existence in Britain, but it is firmly rooted in the reggae tradition.

You have recently launched the LKJ record label. What do you hope to achieve?

I have very modest hopes for it really. I am trying to make an independent intervention as an artist who is making records, and believes he has something to contribute towards the development of reggae music in Britain. I aim to show by example, what it is possible for artists to do by their own efforts, however small the impact. How the music is developing stylistically and so on. I hope it will reach the stage where it is self sufficient. In other words, that it can pay for itself. Then I may be able to give a lot of the young artists the opportunity to make at least one record for themselves.

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Mi Caan Believe It

Mi sey mi caan believe it
mi sey mi caan believe it

room dem a rent
mi apply widin
but as mi go in
cockroach rat an scarpian also come in

wan good nose hafi run
but mi na go
sidung pan 'igh wall like humty dumty
mi a face mi reality

one likkle bwoy come blow im 'orn
an mi look pan im wid scorn
an mi realize 'ow mi fine bwoy pickney
was a victim of de trix
dem call partisan pally-trix

an mi ban mi belly
an mi bawl
an mi ban mi belly
an mi bawl
lawd
mi caan believe it

mi sey mi caan believe it

Mi dawta bwoyfren name is sailor
an im pass through de port like a ship
more gran pickney fi feed
but de whole a wi need
wat a night wat a plight
an we caan get a bite/mi life is a stiff fite
an mi caan believe it

mi sey me caan believe it

Sittin' on de corner wid mi fren
talkin bout tings an time
mi a hear one voice say
'Who dat?'
mi sey 'a who dat?'
'A who a sey who dat
wen mi a sey who dat!'

When yu tek a stock
dem lick wi dung flat
teet start fly/an big man start cry
an mi caan believe it

mi sey mi caan believe it

De oder day mi pass one yard/pan de hill
when mi tek a stock
mi hear

Hi bwoy
yes mam
Hi bwoy
yes mam
Yu clean up de dwag shit?
yes mam
an mi caan believe it

mi sey mi caan believe it

Doris a moder a four
get a wuk as a domestic
boss man move in
an baps si sicai she pregnant again
baps si sicai she pregnant again
an mi caan believe it

mi sey mi caan believe it

Dah yard de oder nite when mi hear
fiah fiah to plate claat
Who dead?
You dead?
Who dead?
Mi dead?
Who dead?
Harry dead?
Who dead?
Eleven dead
Woouuuuuuu
Orange Street fire dey pan mi head
an mi caan believe it

mi sey mi caan believe it

Lawd mi see some black bud livin ina one buildin
but nuh rent nuh pay/so dem caan stay
Lawd de oppress and de dispossess/caan get no rest
what next

tek a trip from Kingston
to Jamaica
tek twelve from a dozen
an mi see mi muma in heaven
... MAD OUSE. . .

mi sey mi caan believe it
mi sey mi caan believe it

Yu believe it?
How yu fi believe it
when yu blind yu eye to it

But mi know yu believe it
Lawwwwwd
mi know yu believe it. . .

Mi Caan Believe It — available on record from LKJ records (see page 64 for details).

I A Tell

i a tell
 i a tell
 i a tell
 no tale
 i a tell
 of reality
 bout di people
 dem a wail
 in dis koncrete hell
 bout tings
 an time
 i a tell
 of crimes
 gainst humanity
 like poverty
 uh! pain
 an grief
 we di people
 dem a feel
 i a tell
 how a fret
 dem a fret
 eh! truble
 tek set
 every tun
 dem mek
 i a tell
 of di terro
 in di nite
 di flite
 fram di fia
 an di blud/blud/blud/blud
 'ow fear
 tek ole
 kanfushan
 kantrol
 i a tell
 bout di lie
 men a tell
 dem talk
 bout uman rites
 but all i site
 is few
 is few
 is few —
 man rites
 an dat
 nuh lie
 i a tell

bout di skank
 dem a skank
 fi mash
 wi rank
 fi ole wi
 dung wid dem
 poli/tricks
 an dem dip
 lo/matik
 tak tiks
 i a tell
 how dem
 tek man
 fi fool
 ave dem
 as tool
 weh dem use
 an refuse
 fi divide wi
 an rule
 i a tell
 i a tell
 i a tell
 no tale
 i a tell
 of reality
 rise!
 stan a stan
 mek a plan
 fi kanfront
 babilan
 first
 free self
 how else?
 step a step
 as one
 step a step
 as one
 fi mash
 dis system
 of oppression
 i a tell
 i a tell
 i a tell
 no tale
 i a tell
 of reality
 yuh nuh si it!

Oku Onuora

A Greena Riddim

**Bass Culture LP by
 Linton Kwesi Johnson
 On Island Records
 Reviewed by Erroll Lloyd**

When a well known poet sets his work to music, it is tempting to approach the end product primarily as poetry with a subsidiary musical backing, and to evaluate them separately, giving prominence to the poetry. However, in his third LP, 'Bass Culture', issued on the Island label, Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ hereafter) underlines his development as a musician. The fact that he wrote the music for the LP himself has ensured that the combination of poetry and music is as much balanced and integrated as one would expect from straight lyrics set to music.

In any case we have been sufficiently conditioned by the frequent appearance of poetic imagery in the lyrics of popular songs to make the distinction between 'poetry' and 'lyrics' somewhat academic. Look for instance at the ease with which Bob Marley moves from narrative to commentary to philosophical refrain in 'Johnny Was' — about a woman who finds her son shot down in the street:

... Woman hold her head and cry
 comforting her I was passing by
 She complained, then she cried
 Yea Yea I know, now I know
 Johnny was a good man
 Can a woman tender care
 Cease towards the child she bear?

Best then to forget about neat classifications and labels and simply to surrender oneself to the totality of the sounds incorporated. For in any case LKJ, by his own admission, writes his poetry very much with music in mind; so that when he eventually gets together with musicians, we can rightly assume that the poetry is merely coming into its own. What is more, the essential Reggae music he draws upon springs from a rich and complex musical tradition which has achieved, over years, a high level of sophistication. And as one of the foremost popular — music idioms in the world today, Reggae music can match every nuance, subtlety or dread inherent

in the poetry. And the use of music, as an integral part of his output, is both an affirmation of his indebtedness to the 'Bass Culture' that cradles his poetry as well as a practical way of achieving a wider audience for his work, especially amongst the black youth to whom much of the work is directed anyway.

Not surprising either that much of the subject matter of the LP has a specific political theme and hinges on the central issue of Police/Black youth confrontation which is symptomatic of a wider struggle in British society.

Side One kicks off with the track that gives the LP its title, 'Bass Culture'. It was a touch of inspiration to have included Rico in the musical line up of this and one or two of the other tracks. His majestic trombone, with its haunting Saturday night echoes of Don Drummond and downtown Kingston of another bygone era, lends a sense of continuity and respectability to the more youthful mind-scattering electronic dub that it is mixed with. It adds depth and meaning to the measured dread of the poetic line.

'Street 66' follows, and is to my mind the tour de force of the collection. The mesmerising bass rhythm exudes a controlled menace, serving as a perfect ploy for the words rich in poetic metaphor. Check this excerpt:

outta dis rock
shall come
a greena riddim
even more dread



dan what
de breeze of glory bred.
vibratin violence
is how wi move
rockin wid green riddim
de drout
and dry root out.

'Reggae Fi Peach' and 'Di Black Petty Booshwah' comprise the remaining two tracks on side one, and if less distinguished, have the merit of straddling a wide enough 'left' political platform to allow LKJ, in one breath, to pay tribute to the white Blair Peach ('The SPG dem a murderah/ We can't mek dem get no furdurah) and in the next to castigate the 'Black Petty Booshwah' for the opportunism typical of that class.

Side Two features four works, the first

of which is titled 'Inglan is a Bitch'. This track enumerates, in ballad style, some of the tribulations of the Black working class. Like 'Di Black Petty Booshwah', it has a strong melodic line which hints at LKJ's potential as a song writer; and though at present he 'intones' rather than sings, he may soon burst into full song.

'Lorraine' is both humorous and endearing and provides light and, I suspect, somewhat tongue-in-cheek relief.

'Reggae Sounds' is musically adventurous with some fine drumming, though pitched a bit too low for the voice to be comfortable.

The final track on this LP is 'Two Sides of Silence' which comes as a reminder, if that were necessary, of the underlying scholarship that informs the poetry of LKJ, and of his mastery of his craft in standard English as well as dialect. The Jazz sound track, however, seemed inappropriate in the context of the LP as a whole, and it might have been preferable either to have no music at all or to have attempted the same schizoid effect by exploring more fully the Reggae/Dub medium.

This then is an LP which is very satisfying on several different levels. Its real merit lies in the way in which its socio-political, poetic, and musical elements are welded into an entertaining creative whole; for the courageous manner it forges new frontiers of thought and expression; and for the hope it must represent to those who feel threatened by the existing order.

Reggae



Poetry

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w'en mi jus' come to Landan toun
mi use to work pan di andahgroun
but workin' pan di andahgroun
y'u don't get fi know your way aroun'

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runnin' whey fram it

mi get a lickle jab in a big 'otell
an' awftah a while, mi woz doin' quite well
dem staat mi aaf as a dish—washah
but w'en mi tek a stack, mi noh tun clack—watchah!

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
noh baddah try fi hide fram it

w'en dem gi' you di lickle wage packit
fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rackit
y'u haffi struggle fi mek en's meet
an' w'en y'u goh a y'u bed y'u jus' cant sleep

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
a noh lie mi a tell, a true

mi use to work dig ditch w'en it cowl noh bitch
mi did strang like a mule, but, bwoy, mi did fool
den awftah a while mi jus' stap dhu ovahtime
den awftah a while mi jus' phu dung mi tool

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
y'u haffi know how fi suvvive in it

well mi dhu day wok an' mi dhu nite wok
mi dhu clean wok an' mi dhu dutty wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but if y'u si how mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
y'u bettah face up to it

dem have a lickle facktri up inna Brackly
inna disya facktri all dem dhu is pack crackry
fi di laas fifteen years dem get mi laybah
now awftah fifteen years mi fall out a fayvah

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runnin' whey fram it

mi know dem have work, work in abundant
yet still, dem mek mi redundant
now, at fifty—five mi gettin' quite ol'
yet still, dem sen' mi fi goh draw dole

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
is whey wi a goh dhu 'bout it?

c Linton Kwesi Johnson

Inglan Is A Bitch

a new book of poems by Linton Kwesi Johnson — The International Reggae Poet

'Inglan is a Bitch' is Linton Kwesi Johnson's third collection of poems. His other two books are 'Voices of the Living and the Dead' and 'Dread Beat an Blood', now in its fourth reprint.

Linton is now popularly known as 'the Reggae poet'. His poems are already well known through his singles and albums 'Dread Beat an' Blood', 'Forces of Victory' and 'Bass Culture'. 'Inglan is a Bitch' is a compilation of poems from these records and other published sources.

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BOOK REVIEWS

POLITICS

Insurrection In Ireland

War and an Irish Town by Eamonn McCann. New and updated edition, Pluto Press, 1980. £1.95.
Reviewed by John La Rose.

'War and an Irish Town' is a classic of modern political writing about insurrectionary upheaval. The Vietnamese seemed not to have unearthed a writer with a novelist's talent for insight and inner detail, like the Chinese revolutionaries found in Edgar Snow's 'Red Star over China' or the Russians in John Reed's 'Ten Days that Shook the World', or Fidel and his rebel army in Wright Mills' 'Listen Yankee' and the 18th and 19th century Haitian rebels in CLR James's 'The Black Jacobins'. Not until Frank Snepp's 'Decent Interval' about the final disintegration of the American empire in South Vietnam and Van Tien Dung's complementary account 'Our Great Spring Victory' did it seem that this modern epic of 20th century workers and peasants struggle really came alive in the written word. Imagination, careful observation, intuition and reality married. So it must be said that the modern Irish insurrection, from 1969 to date, has found an appropriate chronicler in Eamonn McCann.

Ireland and the Caribbean have an unusual connection. Plantations were established in both at the beginning of the 17th century. Cromwell's commanders, Penn and Venables, took Jamaica in 1655 after failing to take Santo Domingo the year before. And on the way to Jamaica they picked up, like litter, a rabble of men at St. Christopher (St Kitts) and Barbados, themselves recently founded plantations.

Life in Ulster, leading up to the war in 1969, rolls on like reels from a long film about a Caribbean plantation colony just before the colonial independence of the 1960s.

These two areas of expanding English empire experienced the common humiliation of slavery and forced migration to centres where capital concentrated its efforts: first, plantations and manufacturing, then later, industrial machine factories. Northern Ireland carries the marks of a classic colony — the unemployment, idleness, the enforced leisure. This leisure undergirded the working class creativity that produced Kaise, steel band, reggae, cadence and, no doubt have their equivalent in Northern Ireland. Here are grown men who have never worked in their lives; or worked only occasionally. To find regular work they have to abandon home and family; emigrate. It happened everywhere that capital touched and exacted tribute creating universal bantustans. In Ulster, like in any modern colony, 20 to 30 per cent unemployment is a fact of everyday life. In times of recession, like now, the percentage rises to 50 and 60 per cent. Capital also created its opposite in these colonial enclaves; the unemployed youth, that tinderbox of modern social rebellions. They parade through the pages of McCann's book, fuelling the civil rights movement and the citizens action committee to uncompromising confrontation with the RUCs, the Brits and with the colonial establishment in London and their stand-ins in Stormont.

"The unemployed youth in areas like the Bogside had, at the outset of the civil rights campaign, been regarded as marching fodder. Energetic and instinctively aggressive, they could be counted on to turn out for sit downs, marches, pickets or any other protest activity which was organised."

Then the road from confrontation to rebellion:

"To my knowledge there is no member of the command staff of the Provos in Derry whose first conscious political experience was other than attendance at a civil rights march or rally and, probably, whatever bout of stone throwing ensued."

Standing between were the mediators: the Catholic/electoral/Nationalist politicians, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, their journals and their schools. The elite grammar schools reproduced the Catholic middle classes who are in direct competition with the Unionist petty bourgeoisie and landlords for control of state patronage and sectors of the economy reserved for this social group. St Columb's in Derry could be St Mary's College in Trinidad or its like in Manchester or Liverpool. The competition in Derry between Nationalist Catholics and Unionist Protestants could be compared with that between the African and Indian petty bourgeoisie in Trinidad or Guyana or Surinam for control of the distribution of patronage, influence and power.

One becomes aware that the theme of Catholic oppression, deprived of its class outlook, has laid its hold on the political outlook of the Catholic oppressed. Consequently, the ambivalence, even among Catholic revolutionaries, to the Catholic hierarchy and the Nationalist/Fianna Fail/Catholic politicians. 'In Memoirs of a Revolutionary', Sean McStofian's book, one sees this ambivalence in spite of the exemplary courage, heroism and dedication to the expulsion of the Brits, the precondition for dismantling the Orange state.

In the Caribbean, the Catholic hierarchy was integrated into the British colonial domination of the islands. The bishops and archbishops were powerful and autocratic. In St. Mary's College, in pre-Independence Trinidad, there were Irish Holy Ghost fathers. Some were racist and



Protest held in Monaghan. Photo credit: Republican News

impertinent to the children of the poor as in Derry. In the early 1930s they still kept out blacks from the school. Things were that clear. Not until the eruption of the 1970s did the Catholic hierarchy make any attempt to arrive at an accommodation with the gathering forces of the social revolution.

This ambivalence, already mentioned, acted as an obvious brake on the necessary struggle for unification between the Catholic Nationalist and Unionist Protestant unemployed workers, and poor, and for building the combination necessary for a revolutionary democratic workers and peoples power in the North and South of Ireland.

The late 1960s were dangerous in the North and South of Ireland.

"Not only were there rioters by the thousand on the streets of Belfast and Derry, there were thousands on the streets of Dublin and other Southern cities demanding that the Fianna Fail government of Jack Lynch move to protect Northern Catholics from what appeared to be developing into a full-scale pogrom."

British government inaction in the North would have led to confrontation and rebellion in the South too. So the soldiers went in to defend British interests.

"Demands were voiced that British-owned property be taken over and

held in ransom for the safety of Northern Catholics. There were strikes".

"British interests were threatened by the apparent inability of the existing political structures, shaken by the adjustments and attempted adjustments of the previous decade, to assimilate and articulate the emotions being aroused."

And McCann argues: "The situation in the North in 1969 threatened the stability of both Irish states".

So first the aggressiveness of the unemployed youth, like in Watts, St Pauls or Trinidad 1970, lit the tinderbox. Then the working class moved with the explosion. This is always the moment of crisis. Talk crumbles and the mail in the fist is exposed. Naked force becomes the arbiter. The British army intervened to contain the upsurge. This was the scenario when the Provos took over the leadership of the National movement. They, in McCann's words, always knew it would come to this. It was familiar ground for them. They were as dedicated to the solution of the national question in Ireland as the left in England and Britain as a whole were dedicated to ignoring it.

The "left had not understood this. ." So "There was no socialist camp in that area of politics". That did not prevent the ferment of nationalism from spilling over among the Welsh and Scottish nationalists, much like the black struggles in the United States aroused the women's strug-

gles which followed with time. The division between revolutionary nationalists and conservative nationalists, so visible in Ireland, began to reveal itself in Scotland and Wales.

And the crisis for the separation and alignment has already arisen and will emerge more clearly, as day follows night, among the major ethnic groups in England.

Sex, race, nation and class become the terrain on which the forces muster to do battle.

Eamonn McCann concludes his book:

"The Provos, despite all their imperfections and the heavy historical impedimenta they carry into political battle, are the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland — this partly because of the failures of the left. They have borne the brunt of repression without wilting. If the Irish conflict could be settled by determination, by unconcern for personal aggrandisement, but an ability and willingness to fight on against overwhelmingly disadvantageous odds, the Provos would have won long ago."

But their epic struggle continues and will until the principles and methods of political warfare are mastered, which enables vital streams to turn into overwhelming torrents.

Poem For Walter Rodney

1

to be blown into fragments: your flesh
like the islands that you loved
like the seawall that you wished to heal

bringing equal rights and justice to the brothers
a fearless cumfa mashramani to the sisters whispering their free/zon
that grandee nanne's histories be listened to with all their ancient fleches of respect

until they are the steps up the poor of the church
up from the floor of the hill/slide
until they become the roar of the nation

that fathers would at last settle into what they own
axe adze if not oil well: torch
light of mackenzie

that those who have all these generations
bitten us bare to the bone
gnawing our knuckles to the dead

price fix price rise rachman and rat/chet squeeze
how bread is hard to buy how rice is scarcer than the muddy water where it rides
how bonny baby bellies grow doom laden dungeon grounded down to groaning in their hunger

grow wailer voiced and red eyed in their anger
that knocks against their xylophones of prison ribs and bars
that how we cannot take our wives or sweethearts or our children or our children's
children

on a trip to kenya: watch
masai signal from their saffron shadow
the waterbuck and giraffe wheel round wrecked manyatta

while little blonder kinter who don't even care
a fart: for whom this is the one more yard
a film: for whom this is the one more start

to colon to cortes to cecil rhodes
to whom this is the one more road
to the thathi headed waiter aban/

died out of his shit by his baas at the nairobi airport hotel

lets his face sulk into i soup
lets his hairshirt wrackle i sweat
cause i man am wearing the tam of i dream in i head

that these and those who fly still dread/er up the sky
vultures and hawks: eye
scarpering morgan the mi/ami mogul

those night beast a babylon who heiss us on sus

but that worst it is the blink
in iani own eye: the sun blott
ed out by paper a cane

fires vamp/ires a ink
wheels emp/ires a status quos status quos status crows
that tell a blood toll/ing in the ghetto

till these small miss/demeanours as you call them
be
come a monstrous fetter on the land that will not let us breed

until every chupse in the face of good morning
be
come one more coil one more spring one more no
thing to sing/about
be
come the boulder rising in the bleed

the shoulder nourishing the gun
the headlines screaming of the skrawl across the wall of surbiton of sheraton hotel
dat

POR CYAAAN TEK NO MOORE

and the babies and their mothers and their mothers and their mothers mothers
and their mothers mothers mothers mothers
perished forever in the semi-automatic catcalls of the orange heat
sizzle fear flare up of siren howl of the scorch wind wail through the rat-a-tat

of the hool through the tap of your head: damp stench criall: the well
of flame drilling aeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee through your flesh:
drrrrrrrraaatat drrrrrrrraaatat drrrraataaatat tat tat tat taaaaaat:

reduced to the time before green/bone
reduced to the time before ash/skull
reduced to the time before love/was born

in your arms
before dawn was torn from your pillow

in your arms
before the tumours were crumpled into paper bags inside the star/broek market

in your arms
before the knife ran through the dark and locket steel was there between the spine
and kidney

in your arms
in your arms
in your arms i prophesay

before you recognised the gorgon head inside the red eye of the walkie talkie

2

to be blown into fragments: your death
like the islands that you loved
like the seawall that you wished to heal

bringing equal rights and justice to the brothers
that children above all others would be like the sun/rise over the rupununi
over the hazy morne over kilimanjaro

any where or world where there is love there is the sky and its blue free
where past means present struggle
towards vlissengens where it may some day end

distant like powis on the essequibo
drifting like miracles or dream
or like that lonely fishing engine slowly losing us its sound

but real like your wrist with its tick of blood over its man
akles of bone
but real like the long marches the court steps of trial

the sodden night journeys holed up in a different safe house every morning
and trying to guess from the heat of the hand
shake if stranger was stranger or cobra or friend

and the urgent steel of the kiskadee
glittering its qqurl
down the sharpest bend in the breeze and the leaves ticking

and learning to live with the smell of rum on the skull's
breath: his cigarette ash on the smudge
of your fingers his footsteps into your houses

and having to say it over and over and over again
with your soft ringing patience with your black
lash of wit: though the edges must have been curling with pain

but the certainty clearer and clearer and clearer again

that it must be too simple to hit/too hurt
not to remember

that it must not become an easy slogan or target
too torn too defaced too devalued down in redemption market

that when men gather govern other manner
they should be honest in a world of hornets

that bleed into their heads like lice
corruption that cockroaches like a dirty kitchen sink

that politics should be like understanding of the floorboards of your house
swept clean each morning: built by hands that know the wind and tide and language
from the loops within the ridges of your footprint to the rusty tinnin fences of your yard.

so that each man on his cramped restless island
on his backdam of land in forest clearing by the broeken river
where berbice struggles against slushy ground

takes up his bed and walks

in the power and the reggae of his soul/stice
from the crippled brambled pathways of his vision
to the certain limpen knowledge of his nam

this is the message that the dreadren will deliver
grounded with drift of mustard seed
that when he spoke the word was flutter on his breeze
since it was natural to him like the way he listened like the way he walked

one of those ital brothers who had grace

for being all these things and careful of it too
and careless of it too
he was cut down plantation cane because he dared to grow and growing/green
because he was that slender reed and there were machetes sharp enough to hasten

it and bleed: he was blown down
because his bridge from man to men meant doom to prisons of a world we never made
meant wracking out the weeds that kill our yampe vine
and so the bomb: fragmenting islands like the land

you loved letting back darkness in

but there are stars that burn that murders do not know
soft diamonds behind the blown to bits
that trackers could not find that bombers could not see
that scavengers will never bribe away

the caribbean bleeds near georgetown prison

a widow rushes out and hauls her children free

Edward Kamau Brathwaite

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Death Of A Comrade

Death must not find us thinking that we die.

Too soon, too soon
our banner draped for you.
I would prefer
the banner in the wind.
Not bound so tightly
in a scarlet fold —
not sodden sodden
with your people's tears
but flashing on the pole
we bear aloft
down and beyond this dark dark lane of rags.

Dear Comrade,
if it must be
you speak no more with me
nor smile no more with me
nor march no more with me
then let me take
a patience and a calm —
for even now the greener leaf explodes
sun brightens stone
and all the river burns.

Now from the mourning vanguard moving on
dear Comrade I salute you and I say
Death will not find us thinking that we die.

Martin Carter
from Poems of Succession

Gulliver And Goliaths

Unable to hold
the dusty world
of cities
in her palm,
she returned
to lie upon her island.
Like Gulliver,
sprinkled by thorns.
While I
fight
Goliaths here
and daily
grow
as tall as she.

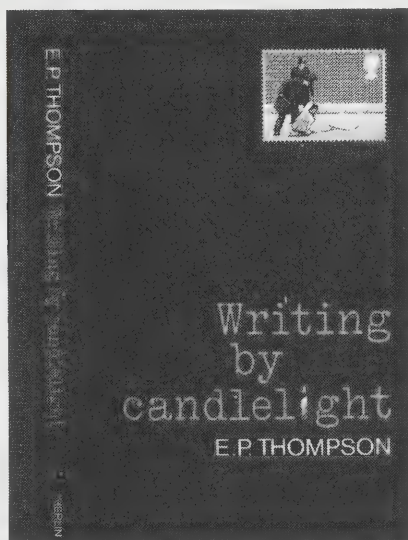
Janice Shinebourne

Candles For Scotland

Writing by Candlelight

by E.P. Thompson The Merlin Press 1980.

Reviewed by Ian McDonald



Civil liberties, from a working class point of view, are about having the space in which to engage in political struggle — to organise alternative bases of power which can lead to the transformation of society, to record the struggle as it progresses and to express, in theory and in practice, an independent class position. This space is always contested and the occupation of any part of it carries no security of tenure. The forms in which the contest takes place vary in time and place and in accordance with what the noted historian and popular democrat, E.P. Thompson, calls our "political culture".

Tied up with the struggle for civil liberties are competing notions of democracy. A society in which every cook can govern is infertile soil for tyrants and despots. If the democratic process is diverted into harmless ritual forms, devoid of any real popular democratic content, not only traditional but all liberties disappear.

In 'Writing by Candlelight' Edward Thompson has published a series of essays (18) in which his main themes are the erosion, by the state, of the democratic process and of our civil liberties and political culture. This is done by the manufacture of public opinion through the press and media, an increase in the powers and presence of the State, and a growth of authoritarianism working behind the backs of the democratic process.

The aim of publishing these essays, according to the preface, is to indicate the gravity of the situation and to summon up resistance.

A typical passage sums up these themes:

but my sense of history suggests that any Rightist takeover in Britain will come, not through the agency of the Mosleys or Websters, but by steady, vegetable pressures from within the state itself; the management of news, the blackmailing of politicians, the political "vetting" of civil servants,

the clipping of the coinage of civil liberties, the enlargement of police powers, the dissemination of calumny against dissenters, the corruption of the jury system, the surveillance and intimidation of radicals, the management of state trials, the orchestration through the media of a "law and order" *grande peur* — and the cry of "national interest". The strategic centre for this pressure will lie with the security service, armed services and police. But it will be ably supported by a vociferous lobby of Tory MP's, captive editors "neutral" television commentators, under secretaries at Whitehall, some judges, and the odd eminent "Oxford professor". My sense of politics suggests that this takeover is already underway. . . against such a takeover this country is provided with few constitutional defences.

The secret state moves forward and, occupies the public state from within, leaving most of the latter's rhetoric, and most of its electoral legitimacy intact. What better "cover" for "M" than a Labour Prime Minister?

The essays are divided into four parts:

the Segregation of Dissent (how the media, now organised into giant corporations, keep out dissent), a miscellaneous group dealing with the struggle at Warwick university in 1970 and pieces on the power workers strike 1970 and the miners

strike in 1972. Then comes the main section, eight essays or sketches on the State and Civil Liberties, followed by two essays on the threat to civil liberties of a nuclear state and the need for nuclear disarmament. There is no room in a review to deal in any depth with the wide ranging subject matter of the essays.

One subject to which he returns again and again is the jury and the attempts by vetting, judges' directions, and behind the scenes administrative changes, as well as changes in the law, to curtail its power.

Here I have a quibble with him. In his essay, 'Trial by Jury', he sets out some of the recent changes in the jury and asks "why, so suddenly has all this discounting, vetting and tampering been going on?" Modernisation is his answer. "Modernising authority finds democratic practice to be inconvenient". This is not good enough. The right to challenge a panel of jurors because they do not contain any of your peers, the right of the defence to know the occupation of jurors, and the right to challenge seven jurors peremptorily have all been taken away not just because the state likes "modernisation". These were all rights vigorously used by defendants in a sustained and organised fashion, starting in the Mangrove trial in 1971. It was because of the resulting acquittals that these rights were taken away. We had always assumed that juries were vetted, and we tried by individual challenges and by challenges to the panel to even things up. This was long before the ABC or 'Persons Unknown' trials. In fact we now know that the vetting went on, but that the corresponding rights of defendants were quietly and without any public discussion removed.

Edward Thompson has come under a lot of criticism from his own constituents in the 'left' for his insularity, liberal illusions and sentimental attachment to certain of our institutions, for his views on terrorism, and especially over his earlier expressed view that the Rule of

For Amilcar Cabral

A small part
of the mountain shifted,
today;
it seemed to go
a little to the west;
merely shadowed
by the usual cloud,
I told myself.

We weren't
really expecting it,
though I know
we should have been
on the look-out,
knowing how insistent
things are
in the punishment
capital and murder inflict,
and knowing that any paid hand
can hold a gun,
especially
when your kind of offence
is total liberation,
now;
and, of course,
you were just about
to make your final moves
through the bush
and across the water.

I can hear the su-su,
brutal as ever:
"He made too free
with the ideas and the fight.
He had to be stopped
at dead of night.
We did it
when he was alone.
No witnesses.
Right?"

But the rest of the mountain,
bulging, there, in the dark,
saw the bullets slice into you;
they pierced us, too;
they've gone so far
inside the slope
that they've shaken
the interlocked layers
down to the furnace
at the core;
the shaking must continue;
it has already reached
the outstretched hand;
more and more of the mountain
will come forward;
Bissau will change.

Andrew Salkey

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Law in Britain has been an "unqualified human good".

Terrorism is a blanket description used to mask the politics of those who are so labelled. This is how Thompson appears to use it. Without going into detail, it seems to me that you cannot deal with terrorism as a political abstraction or to dismiss it in blanket fashion, as he does, because it provides good training ground for the forces of repression. All class struggle does this. It's like saying that the English Chartists were quite wrong because they gave the State the perfect pretext for extending the police force to areas outside Metropolitan London.

The existence of the Rule of Law undoubtedly inhibits the power of those who rule us, which is preferable to arbitrary or despotic rule, but I can hardly see that as an "unqualified human good", especially as the other side of the Rule of Law is that we are expected to obey the law however harsh or hostile to our interests. Thompson's explanation at page 230 is the one and only part of his book where he becomes almost incomprehensible.

The fact that we may have disagreements over the 'Rule of Law' or 'Terrorism' does not diminish the value of these essays. For me the publication is a tremendous event. A new spirit of resistance to creeping state repression is afoot in this country, and these essays are an im-

portant part of it. Where it is going and how it will fare we do not yet exactly know. But reading these essays provides us with ample material to begin understanding where we have come from, where we are now and what is our potential. The book will be an inspiration to that resistance and a historical underpinning of it.

There are, however, limits on what any one man can do. Edward Thompson derives his inspiration from strictly English historical traditions. His work helps us with the specifically English side of our experience. Those of us who came to live and work in England from other parts of Britain, as I have, or from the Caribbean or elsewhere can draw strength from that experience, but we also have an added history and experience from which we and our English friends can draw strength. Writing about the specifically English experience, as Edward Thompson does, is not insularity. It would only be so if he was saying that the only valid experience is the English one, which he does not. I know something of the work done in relation to the Caribbean because of my connection with 'Race Today' and the Black Alliance. I still await someone to do for Scotland what Edward Thompson has done for England or CLR James for the Caribbean. If anyone up there is thinking of it, I will willingly send them some candles.

lines for itself. Publications Distribution Cooperative, for example, grew up in response to the failure of W.H. Smiths and other established distributors to deal with the wave of alternative magazines such as 'The Leveller' or 'Spare Rib'. It began its work in the autumn of 1976, at first dealing solely with the distribution of periodicals. PDC later found it financially necessary to expand into books as well to help cover costs. At present PDC carries well over 100 periodicals and 800 books and pamphlets and visits, on a regular basis, some 500 shops all over Britain. They estimate that about two thirds of these could be classed as radical or alternative shops.

Another important development has been the Socialist Book Fair, founded in 1977 by Bookmarks, the bookshop of the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP saw the need to provide a shop window to celebrate the emergence of alternative publishing. Again such a display could not be provided for by the established London Book Fair, if for no other reason than that the price of stands there are too prohibitive for small publishers. The Socialist Book Fair, held every autumn in the St. Pancras Town Hall, has grown from some 50 publishers in 1977 to well over 100 for this year. There is a wide spectrum represented. PDC has its own stand displaying the titles of numerous small groups. The bigger more commercial alternative publishers, such as Pluto Press (SWP) or Virago (women's movement), are well represented. And there are also a number of establishment publishers — Penguin, Heinemann, MacMillan and so on—who, having seen the commercial sense of the Fair, are keen to display those titles on their lists of interest to the radical alternative literary culture.

The Socialist Book Fair, like PDC, also provides a valuable service for the alternative bookshops. It is possible, under the one roof, to browse over titles which many alternative bookshops would be keen to stock, but have great difficulty in finding out about through the more conventional method of publishers reps and catalogues.

While alternative publishing and book-selling established itself and flourished in the 1970s when government policy was to pour funds into 'community' projects, it is now to be seen what effect the harder climate of the 1980s will have. While some institutions must fall by the wayside, others have put down independent, disciplined and structured roots. They will survive and provide an integrity which can never come from the established publishing houses and bookshops, held in the grip of international high finance.

Breaking The Grip

Alternative Publishing and Bookselling
Reviewed by Sarah White.

The development of a confident alternative publishing and bookselling tradition in Britain has been an important event of the 1970s. Starting in the mid 1960s, New Beacon Books and Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications were the two pioneers, for example, establishing independent black bookselling and publishing. They were followed by other black institutions—Grassroots, Sabarr and Headstart in London, Harriet Tubman in Birmingham and Raddla in Leicester among others.

Centerprise in Hackney was one of the first 'community' bookshops and a pioneer in publishing small cheap publications based on local experience and talent. Numerous 'community' bookshops and publishers grew up in its shadow. Others sprung up around the women's movement, the gays, environmental, anarchist and other causes.

Finance for many of these bookshops came from government and local govern-

ment funds, urban aid, Manpower Services, the Arts Council, Greater London Arts Association and other funds, which were widely available in the 1970s. They were regarded by the state as job-providers with a palliative role to play in the community. The same is true of all the black bookshops mentioned above apart from New Beacon and Bogle-L'Ouverture.

Many of the left parties also started their own bookshops. The Communist Party already had their well established Central Books, but the 1970s saw the setting up of IS Books (now Bookmarks) by the Socialist Workers Party, the Other Bookshop by the International Marxist Group and three Paperbacks shops by the Workers Revolutionary Party.

Thus, by the mid-1970s, there was a flourishing alternative publishing and bookselling culture in Britain. And for the first time this alternative culture began to organise structures and discip-



NOVELS

The World Of Black Women

The Bluest Eye and Sula. By Toni Morrison.

Published by Chatto & Windus. £4.95 & £6.50. Reviewed by Barbara Beese.

These two novels, by Toni Morrison, are small town, industrial belts of Ohio, between the two World Wars. located in the black communities of the

'The Bluest Eye', her first novel, is the story of the Breedlove family. Cholly Breedlove and his wife, Pauline, like many thousands of other blacks, migrated to Lorain, Ohio, in search of waged labour. It is the first urban experience for both. They have two children, Sammy, about whom we know little, and Peccola. Cholly begins work at one of the mills, but when the recession begins to bite, he turns to drink and engages in savage fights with Pauline. The relationship rapidly degenerates. Pauline, whose sensibilities are shocked and numbed by the tortures of urban living, seeks salvation in religion, and settles for the power she accrues from being the 'ideal servant' in the home of a white family. It is the kind of home Pauline has only ever seen in the movies and, to complete the scenario, they have a blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter on whom Pauline lavishes the kind of care and affection her own family never gets to see. In short, it's a 'perfect' home with a 'perfect' white family, in stark contrast to what the Breedloves have or will ever have.

Twelve year old Peccola is convinced she is ugly because she is black. She is equally convinced that she will be transformed, and receive love and attention, if only she can acquire a pair of blue eyes. The book describes the tortures she endures at home and at school where, like most lonely children, she is picked on and laughed at. Her refuge is a world of her own in which she idolises Shirley Temple.

CATHOLIC MOTHER

Francis X. D'Souza
father of the year.
Here he is top left
the one smiling.
By the Grace of God he says
we've had seven children
(in seven years)
We're One Big Happy Family
God Always Provides
India will Suffer for
her Wicked Ways
(these Hindu buggers got no ethics)

Pillar of the Church
says the parish priest
Lovely Catholic Family
says Mother Superior

the pillar's wife
says nothing.

MARRIAGES ARE MADE

My cousin Elena
is to be married.
The formalities
have been completed:
her family history examined
for T.B. and madness
her father declared solvent
her eyes examined for squints
her teeth for cavities
her stools for the possible
non-Brahmin worm.
She's not quite tall enough
and not quite full enough
(children will take care of that)
Her complexion it was decided
would compensate, being just about
the right shade
of rightness
to do justice to
Francisco X. Noronha Prabhu
good son of Mother Church.

Eunice de Souza

She is finally driven quite insane, precipitated by her father raping her. Much of what happens to Peccola is seen through the eyes of Claudia MacTeer, a black girl of Peccola's age, but quite different in character. Claudia, for example, despises Shirley Temple, not the least for having danced in a film part with the legendary black 'hoofer', Bill Bojangles.

'Sula', Toni Morrison's second novel, was published two years after 'The Bluest Eye'. It is set in the small but developing town of Medallion, Ohio, in the years following the first World War. Its focus is the growth, development and eventual destruction of a friendship between two young black girls, Sula Peace and Nel Wright.

Sula and Nel are raised in quite contrasting regimes. Sula grows up in a chaotic household owned and ruled by her one-legged grandmother, Eva Peace. Confined to a wheelchair, Eva directs the comings and goings of her daughter Hannah (Sula's mother), her son Plum, friends who pass in and out, homeless stray children whom she adopts on whim, and a constant stream of boarders. The prevailing atmosphere is one of freewheeling sex and freewheeling morals. Sula observes and internalises all she sees and hears. From her mother, who

is the butt of the town womens' gossip because of her free sexual practices, often with their husbands, she learns that sex can be pleasant, frequent, but is otherwise unremarkable. From a conversation she overhears between her mother and friends, she learns that she is loved by Hannah but not liked.

Nel is the product of an ordered, Christian, god-fearing house, financed by a father away at sea. Her mother, Helene, a southern, brownskin beauty, who has married to escape the stifling Jim Crow regime of the South, is determined to be everything a 'nigger' is not, and attempts to fashion her own daughter in this image. Thus spontaneity and self-indulgence, which characterise the personality of Sula, are suppressed in Nel.

The book follows their progress as they explore, discover and share the world around them of boys, sex and men. While the difference and contrast in their upbringing appears to be of no significance as children, in maturity it tears them apart. The breakdown begins when Nel decides to marry, even though Sula appears to be for the marriage. Sula leaves town and returns 10 years later. She discovers her friend bogged down in domesticity with three children, and when Sula beds Nel's

husband, the fabric of their childhood friendship is torn to shreds. The break between them is bitter and acrimonious and remains unresolved even on Sula's death bed when they come together for the last time.

Having described something of the stories, it necessary to say what more the books have to offer. For neither are merely stories, and to reduce them to such, or dismiss them as such, would be like, as the proverbial saying goes, "missing the wood for the trees".

In reading 'The Bluest Eye', you discover, in the most unlikely place, (one of the sub plots), the key to what both books are really about. The occasion is that of the death of one grand old lady known as Aunt Jimmy. Aunt Jimmy was, at one period, responsible for the upbringing of Cholly after he was abandoned as a baby by his mother. When she takes poorly, her peers gather to reminisce. Suddenly, we are treated to a penetratingly poignant, poetic and philosophical treatise on the world of black women. Listen to this: "But they had been young once. The odor of their armpits and haunches had mingled into a lovely musk; their eyes had been furtive, their lips relaxed, and the delicate turn of their heads on those slim black necks had been like



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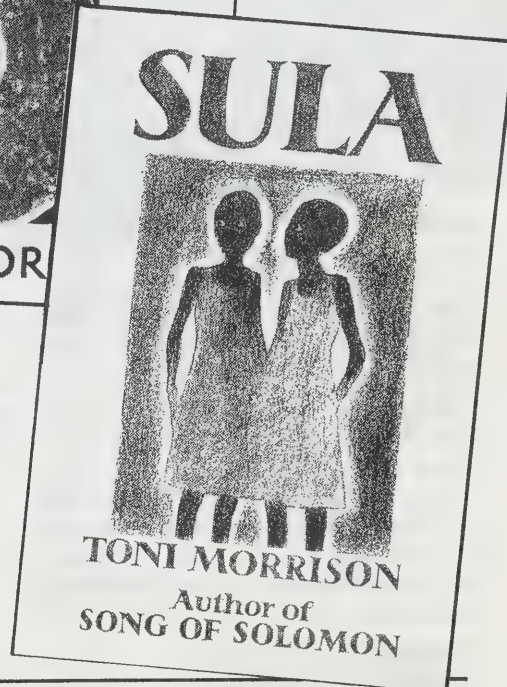
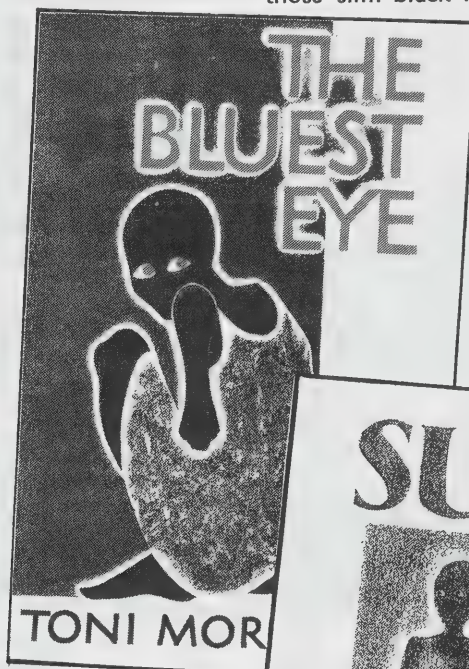
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nothing other than a doe's. Their laughter had been more touch than sound.

Then they had grown. Edging into life from the back door. Becoming. Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this." White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other....They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other.....

Then they were old. Their bodies honed, their odor sour....They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror.....They were old enough to be irritable when they chose, tired enough to look forward to death They were in fact and at last, free.

All the black women in these novels either are, or aspire to reflections and negations of the categories she so beautifully describes. She captures, at a stroke, the life-long cruelty, shame, pain humiliations, tortures and contradictions which characterise the black female existence. They either make or break her.

Peccola is broken in youth. Not so Claudia, Nel or Sula. Pauline enters maturity, "edging into life from the back door." So does Helene, Nel's mother. So does Nel herself. Not so Sula, or her mother Hannah. Not so Eva Peace. Not so the whores who live above the Breed-loves. They come storming in through the front door, defying all and cowering to none. When confronted by young Irish immigrants, who want to beat Sula and Nel up, Sula takes a knife and fearlessly cuts off the top of her finger to show how bad she is. Rather than endure the pain of having to nurse, all over again, her son, Plum, who returns from the war a junkie, Eva pours petrol over him and burns him to death. Desperate solutions borne out of a desperate existence. Again, when Sula is told to settle down and make some babies, she defiantly declares, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself." And in her death-bed confrontation with Nel, part of the conversation goes like this:

Nel: "You can't have it all, Sula."

Sula: "Why? I can do it all, why can't I have it all?"

Nel: "You *can't* do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't."

Sula: "You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?"

Nel: "I don't think so and you wouldn't either if you had children."

Sula: "Then I really would act like what you call a man. Every man I ever knew left his children....You think I don't know what your life is just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing....Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world....Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me."

Nel: "Lonely, ain't it?"



Rhygin In The Forward

The Harder They Come
by Michael Thelwell
Published by Pluto Press £2.95
Reviewed by Kit Rachlis

Michael Thelwell's novel has many predecessors — Chinua Achebe's novels of colonial and post-colonial West Africa, the Staggerlee legend, Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man', and, of course, Perry Henzell's movie, on which the book is based. But, for all its debts (and Thelwell acknowledges many in his introduction), the book belongs only to itself. To call 'The Harder They Come' the finest novel about reggae is to miss the point — though reggae is more than its soundtrack. To call 'The Harder They Come' the finest novel about Jamaica or the Third World is a claim I can't — and wouldn't want to — make. Let me put it this way: in 25 years, rock 'n' roll hasn't produced a novel as full or as commanding. This is a book that doesn't apologise. It takes you by the hand (there's a glossary of Jamaican terms, for instance), guides you through a world most of us aren't familiar with, and, at the same time, lets you know that you're on your own — a book where moral judgments and understanding are demanded, and are never easy.

Obviously, Thelwell has reversed the novelist's usual course. One can imagine Grove's advertising campaign, "You've seen the movie! Now read the book!" — which isn't far from what Thelwell intends. As he says in his introduction, this is not a quickie "novelisation" of a screenplay, the product of a Hollywood lunch, but "the novel from which the film might have been derived." It's easy

Sula: "Yes. But my lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely."

The men in these novels are peripheral characters. Not because she is anti-black men. She offers no indication whatsoever that she is so narrow minded. Her preoccupation is with tearing away the veil from the hidden world of black women.

These are two remarkable novels in every aspect; style, content, characterisation and language. Every black woman will recognise something of herself in them. So too will black men. The absence of whites is all the more reason why these books should be required reading for them.

to understand why Thelwell didn't see any need to change the film's basics; the movie feels as complete and charged as the outlaw legend it draws from. And yet, as the novel proves, there was more to say — history to fill in, connections to be made, points of view to be considered — because the legend of Rhygin is more than just the story of a reggae desperado; it's the story of an entire culture's undergoing a wrenching and overwhelming transformation: from rural to urban, agrarian to industrial, from colonialism to independence. The frightening part of 'The Harder They Come' is that, in the end, it's a legend about loss — about the horrific price of a country's becoming "modern." The harder they fall.

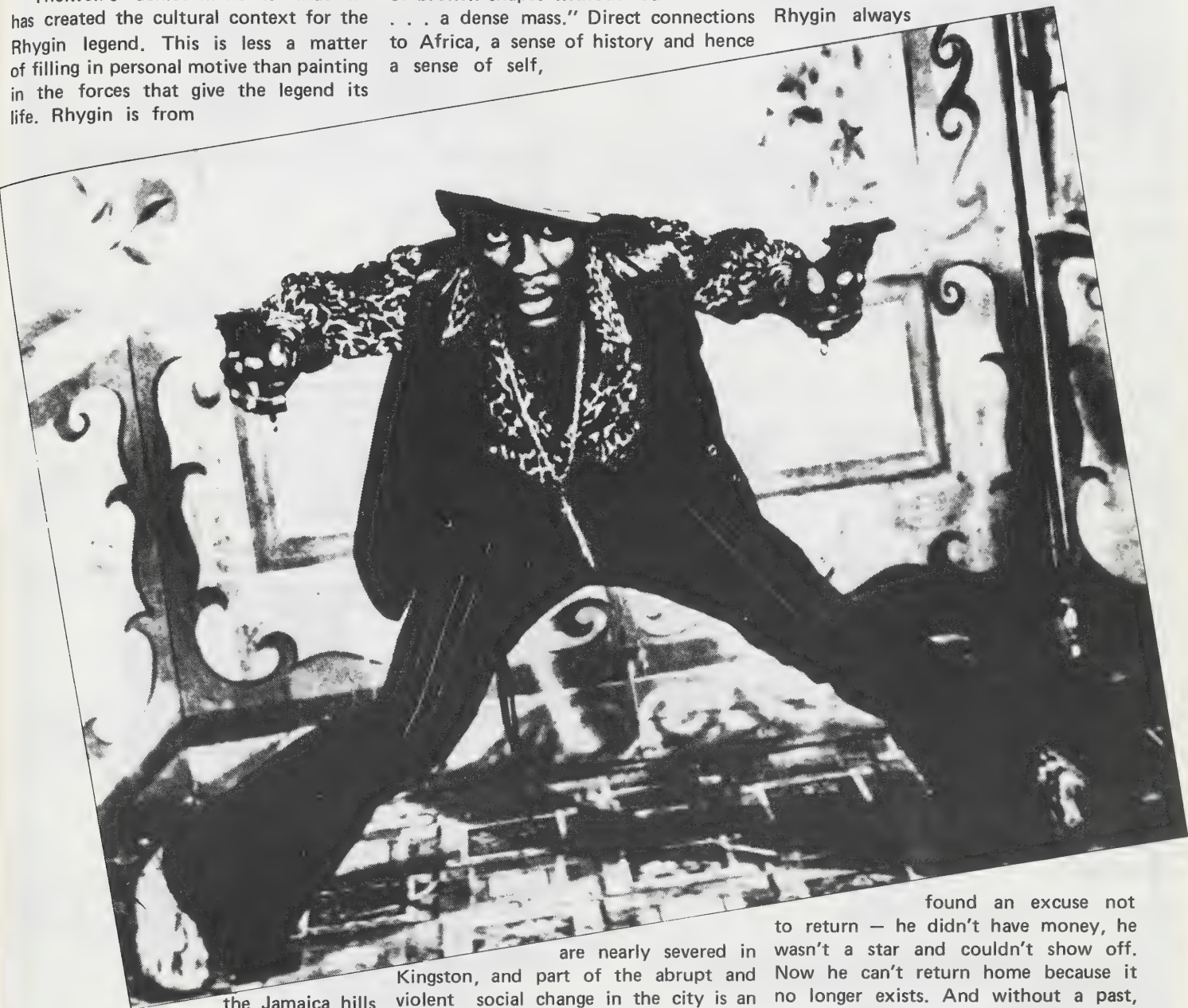
Thelwell can't provide the sounds of reggae, but he can provide its reasons. To Jamaicans, reggae embodies all that is seductive in modern life: the chance to be famous, the chance to be wealthy. Picked up on a transistor radio, reggae's precursors are what call a teenage Rhygin down from the Jamaican hills, his family home for years and into Kingston. Yet, as the music of Kingston's new underclass — to which a beggar, day laborer, small-time thief, and dope trader like Rhygin belongs — reggae stands in opposition to all that is seductive in modern Jamaican life. The contradiction is at the center of 'The Harder They Come', and neither the novel nor the movie treats it abstractly; reggae may be the music of the disenfranchised, but the reggae industry — re-

ferred to as Hilton's Empire — is under the control of one man. And there's one more contradiction: in the novel, reggae is a subversive but not outwardly political music. Rhygin's response to being shut out by the world — by Jamaica's legal system, party system, economic system — is instinctive: he wants to destroy the world and emulate it. He wants to be a star *and* he wants to be an outlaw. He gets his wish — by book's end, he's Number One on the wanted list and on the radio.

Thelwell's achievement is that he has created the cultural context for the Rhygin legend. This is less a matter of filling in personal motive than painting in the forces that give the legend its life. Rhygin is from

whose connections with Africa are ingrained: not only through their support of Marcus Garvey in the '20s and their ancestry in Jamaica's 18th-century free black-warrior communities, but through a view of the cosmos that includes spirits and goss. Kingston — and this isn't an over-wrought wordplay on Thelwell's part — is another kind of jungle: "Card-board cartons, plywood and rotting boards, the rusting and glassless shells of cars. . . . These shanties crowded each other in an incoherent jumble of broken shapes without road or order . . . a dense mass." Direct connections to Africa, a sense of history and hence a sense of self,

similar challenge can be heard in the music, as imported R&B turns into ska and finally into reggae. And yet, Thelwell suggests, these responses, admirable though they are, are too meager to reassert the values of community that have been abandoned or destroyed. When Rhygin goes back to visit his home, he finds that his house is overgrown by jungle; the local fishing village has been turned into condominium-cottages for tourists, and wealthy hippies are making a mockery of the farming virtues that he was raised on. For years, Rhygin always



the Jamaica hills, a jungle that "was in reality a testament to human tenacity. For there was not to be found there six trees that did not contribute significantly to meeting the needs of the small community" — a community whose close ties contribute to its self-sufficiency, where every individual act has a purpose and every collective one is part of ritual. These are people

are nearly severed in Kingston, and part of the abrupt and violent social change in the city is an attempt to renew that connection. The members of Rhygin's gang take their names from American gangster and cowboy movies — they answer to Bogart, Bendix, Cagney, and Widmark and call their headquarters "Salt Lake City Ranch"; as the Rastas become prominent, they mock the gang for identifying with white heroes. A

found an excuse not to return — he didn't have money, he wasn't a star and couldn't show off. Now he can't return home because it no longer exists. And without a past, he has no future and there's nothing left but self-immolation.

A friend once said that she didn't think 'The Harder They Come', the movie, had a moral point of view. Though the movie clearly condemns the circumstances that led to Rhygin's act of murder, it just as clearly presents its hero as a vicious

Continued on page 81

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murderer, capable of slashing someone's face 13 times with a knife. It's a good question — one, I think, that Thelwell set out to answer with his novel. The moral center lies not in Rhygin, he's suggesting, but in the idea of Rhygin as pop star and outlaw; it lies not among the petty criminals of Kingston, but in

the idea of a community in opposition. And, finally, the moral center lies in the book itself, in reggae, in the process of extending a culture by reclaiming its history, by making demands that no government but only we ourselves can meet.

Reprinted from 'The Boston Phoenix'

In simple contrast is West Indian culture, which needs no introduction or translation. Reggae has a following, black and white; Jamaican films are on general release and in the news; and in the last ten years there has grown an industry which makes it its business to bring a part of the creativity of the islands into the schools and colleges.

The present anthology is the first such collection from Asia that can (considering educational cuts, school budgets and readability) and should be taken up, as a project or a passion, by that same industry. Why? Because Ash's anthology puts together some of the best traditional writers of India, united and partitioned. The first story was written in 1895, and the latest one in about '71. The book includes a Tagore story in the style of Maupassant and takes in a younger generation of writers who have absorbed Tagore and Hesse, Kafka and Satre.

The selection has several unities. Ms Ash's purpose can almost be said to be aggressively social. Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis write all sorts of stories — good, bad and filthy — but Ms Ash has made a political choice. She gives us those stories which make poignant comment on

Tagore And Company

Short Stories From India, Pakistan and Bangladesh Edited by Ranjana Ash
Harrap

Reviewed by Farrukh Dhondy

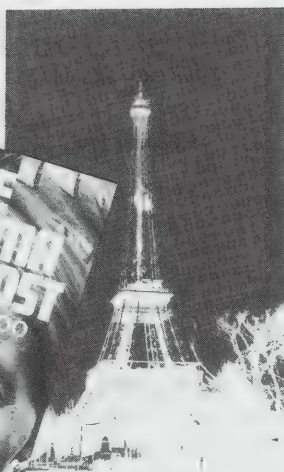
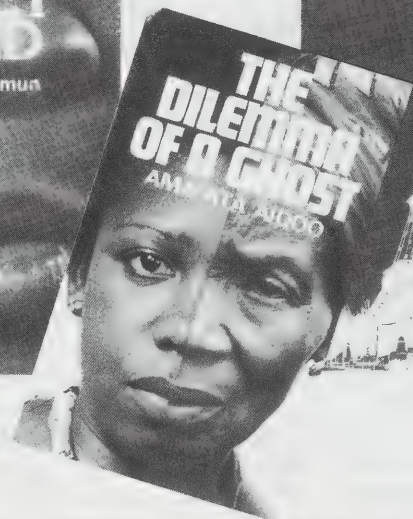
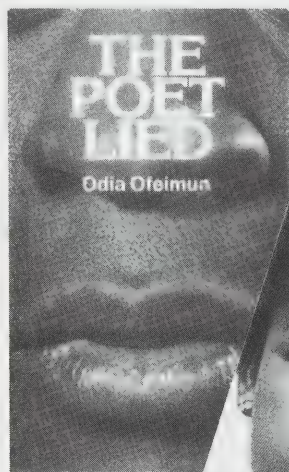
The Russian poet Yevtushenko once remarked that translations were like women if they were beautiful they were not faithful, if they were faithful they were not beautiful. The joke is from another era. In this day of trenchant feminism and easy crossings of cultural boundaries, it seems dated.

Ranjana Ash's selection of short stories from the sub-continent, and indeed her own translations of the Bengali stories of Burhanuddin Jahangir, Sunil Gangopadhyaya and Abu Jaffar

Shamsuddin, retain their flavour in English and present the reader with an ambitious feast.

It's about time the ambition came into its own. The cultural produce of India has, so far, in Britain, been confined to ghettos. The Hindi films we see in Tooting or in the East End or in Bradford have an exclusively Asian following. Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen enjoy international reputations only at the film institutes where addicts go.

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poverty, suffering, injustice, working conditions, class. She has collected those writers who have taken sides in the plight if not in the fight.

Tagore's story (to the editor the word 'political' is a wide net) tells with comical irony of an unloved wife. Premchand's story is about a peasant who is forced to become an agricultural labourer. Bandopadhyay's famous tale is of a boatman who would kill someone he loves to survive. Ganguli's is about starvation.

The anthology has very skilfully

chosen those stories which are not only about the individual and differentiated characters in them, but about 'the masses'. Western writers have traditionally tried to achieve, in their readers' minds, a generalisation from their characters to something they call 'the human condition'. The Asian writers gathered here use their characters as symbols of classes. The ability to do that gently, entertainingly, differently each time is something that the West hasn't wanted to do and Soviet literature hasn't been allowed to do. Let's claim the ability and the art

for India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

But what of the pronounced intention of the preface "to introduce students in secondary schools and colleges of further education to the literature of. . . .". If I was translating a book of English stories for use in Indian schools, the last ones I would pick would be by Kipling, Joyce, Kinglsey Amis and Ian McEwan. Their stories would be part of a B.A. course in an Indian college and not on the official or ethnically orientated syllabuses of the classes we would in Britain call the fourth year CSE.

Helping The Author

Poona Company by Farrukh Dhondy Victor Gollancz, £4.95.

Reviewed by Lynne Richards.

'Poona Company' is Farrukh's third collection of short stories and his fourth book for young people. This latest collection deals with the society of his youth and the company he kept during school and college days, in the Chowk cafes of his home town of Poona. There are nine stories in all, recalling incidents and characters; replete with the backchat, the "quick answer", the "gossip and hints of scandal that floated about like cigarette smoke in that atmosphere".

I do not think the book merits the description, "a richly drawn portrait of an Indian boyhood", because there is no real depth to the portrait he draws. It begs comparison with another portrait, "Portrait of an artist as a young man" by the Irishman, James Joyce, precisely because Joyce probed beneath the surface of everyday events and behaviour to reveal a richness of character and insight into the consciousness of the young man. The central concerns of the Dublin society — language, nationality and Catholicism — are sharply illuminated and as pertinent today as they were then.

In the case of 'Poona Company' the stories are one dimensional; they might entertain but you read to forget. Each story can be reduced to the barest bones of social existence. They catalogue the youths' several responses to the overriding pressure of passing school and college exams. The difference between getting, at best, a clerical job in Bombay; relying on a "renewal of funds" (family money), or taking the opening gambit of a university abroad — "the big game".

The characters are introduced but never really explored in depth. As in the story 'Confession D'Souza', only an inclination is given of the interplay

between the events in Prabhat's life and his own character. Yet, though we know the consequences of his actions, we never really grow to know him. Prabhat's relationships, with his mother, the editor or student journalists like Farrukh, are flat. They suffer from the autobiographical approach to the story, moreso because we are never able to penetrate these relationships, to gain insights into their characters and see beyond the conflict, as the story unfolds.

It is hard to see, from this last collection of stories, how Farrukh sees himself developing as a writer. In an article on 'The black writer in Britain', (Race Today, May/June 1979) he spoke disparagingly about "being seen as someone who explains blacks to whites", about the fact that "culture and its clash are seen as your central thematic material", whilst seriously wanting an audience

"independently of the sub-culture and good intentions of multi-ethnicity".

Yet, it is precisely because Farrukh can so easily write books for the classroom, which will be well received by teachers, that his stories have served this purpose only too well. He has supplied teachers with the books they clamour for. Teachers have been engaged in a shameless pursuit of books, which portray black youth, which has been reflected in how they view Farrukh's books, as a way to reach their pupils.

This has led to a serious want of critical consideration of the merits of each book. It is as though the very fact of conflict was a sufficient explanation of what the youth are going through. Therefore the stories are one-dimensional, and the readiness with which teachers absorb these books, uncritically, helps neither reader, nor author.

A Working Class View

'Our Lives': Young People's Autobiographies Published by the Inner London Education Authority English Teachers' Centre: 1979. Price: £1.95

Reviewed by Roxy Harris

The book consists of 11 pieces written during the last 5 or 6 years by young people aged 15 to 17 attending secondary schools in London. The contributors come from Morocco, Jamaica, Uganda, England, India, Ireland and Hong Kong. Most of the writing was prompted by a competition organised by the ILEA English Teachers' Centre in 1979, but four of the contributions had already been published separately by the Centre. Most of this collection is straight autobiography, or imaginative writing with autobiographical inspiration.

This book is part of a deeply significant trend which has been developing in Britain

over the last decade. Working class adults and youth have written or taped their experiences for publication. These experiences have been read and enjoyed in educational institutions all over the country. The readers, coming from similar backgrounds to the authors, have been motivated to talk and write about their own lives.

One of the early, key elements in this movement was the organisation called Centerprise. Centerprise had the explicit aim of publishing short autobiographies of working class people living and working in the Hackney area of East

London. Some of the results were published in two substantial and well-produced volumes of working-class autobiography entitled 'Working Lives'. The volumes were widely read by students in adult literacy classes, many of whom proceeded to write about themselves, and in turn had their writing published.

'Our Lives' is part of the mushrooming trend. Now that the idea of producing this kind of literature is relatively common place, it is easy to take it for granted and to miss its significance. It has helped to begin a process of developing, in working class writers and readers, the sense of self-confidence and legitimacy about their lives and experiences long enjoyed by the upper and middle classes. The British upper and middle classes have used their books, plays, poems, newspapers and magazines, their school curricula and exam systems like a steamroller, both at home and in their former colonies. They have used all these channels to establish a kind of universal legitimacy for what has only really been their own narrow class view of the world. Most importantly, this domination has been devastating in the area of language. In his piece 'All Men Are Brothers', Tang Hoi Lee writes of Hong Kong:

"English is the first language of education, not Chinese, because Hong King is a colony. It was in 1973 that Chinese became legal to teach in. Before that they had a subject called 'Chinese', but now you can learn everything in Chinese."

But even the working class in Britain and people from the former English-speaking Caribbean colonies have been intimidated into accepting that the forms of English used by the British upper and middle classes are the only forms of English which can be legitimately written down and read.

Errol O'Connor's 'Jamaica Child' and Chelsea Herbert's 'In the Melting Pot' make attempts to break with this tradition. O'Connor, in writing about boyhood in Jamaica, puts all the dialogue in Jamaican Creole English. Obviously, there are difficulties, especially for a young person, in trying to write in a style for which you have no written model; but O'Connor's efforts are to be admired.

In a literate society, writing and publishing in a language goes a long way towards legitimising it. Chelsea Herbert's dialogue is less consistent in style, but this matches the turbulence inherent in the rising language of London/Jamaican English whose tones she catches well.

Reading these stories brings a forcible reminder of how the former British colo-



nies of the Caribbean waste two of their ready-made assets — their people and their language. They continue to import reading books in large quantities which they can't afford; by writers who have no understanding of the mass of the people, and who write in a language which is alien to the worker and peasant majority of the population.

The young authors in this volume also remind us, in many poignant passages, about the tremendous upheavals and family break-ups that ex-colonial peoples have suffered in moving from one society to another. Sabir Bandali describes in 'Small Accidents', not only how he himself left Uganda for England in the 1970's, but also how his father suffered in moving from India to East Africa in the 1930's, and finally died a miserable death after a short time in England. The Moroccan, Zohra El Kssmi, entitles her piece 'Families', and the first two sections of her story are 'The Family Breaks up', and 'Foster Family'. Fellow Moroccan, Mohammed Elbaja, in his story 'My Life', writes sections with titles like 'Life without a Father', and 'Without a Mother and Father.'

Here, youth write with great nostalgia about their lives in their countries of origin, but always with a sense of realism about how hard life there really is. Marcia Chevers, in her 'Trip to Jam Down', states bluntly:

"I had been told a lot about Jamaica, that it was a beautiful place to live in and that it was a much nicer and better country than England. I had been told all of these things by my

mother and her family who are all living in England. But one of the things that I could never understand was that if it was such a beautiful place then why did they come to England to live."

Later, she writes:

"Jamaica is not all as good as it might seem on a holiday. There is a great unemployment problem, bad housing, and a lot of poverty."

Basic political realities constantly form a natural backdrop to the writing. For example, 'Small Accidents' gives us an insight into the relations between Africans and Asians in Uganda, leading up to Idi Amin's expulsion of the Asians.

But Britain, too, is very much a country of nationalities as the origins of these writers show. Many of their parents have tried to shed their nationality and submerge themselves in what they see as the safety of 'Englishness', but large numbers of youth do not seem to share these illusions. Anna Leitrim, in 'Me and My History', writes:

"Since coming to England, my parents seem to have rejected their nationality and culture. They have become very Englishified so to speak... Even though I was born here, I feel that I am Irish, Ireland is part of me and that's something that I will never forget or reject as long as I live."

The powerful mixture of national identity, cultural identity and class identity is one

which is potentially of the highest political importance in Britain.

The teachers and others associated with bringing books such as 'Our Lives' to publication have done a good job. However, they suffer from constraints due to their sources of finance, the official positions they hold, and the fact that their knowledge of the communities from which the authors come is limited. Willing elements of the different nationalities have a duty and responsibility to develop and deepen the kind of work of which 'Our Lives' is a part.

Life On The Hill

The Dragon Can't Dance
by Earl Lovelace
Andre Deutsch £4.95
Reviewed by CLR James

This novel by Earl Lovelace is a landmark, not in the West-Indian but in the contemporary novel. So large a claim this review must establish.

CALVARY HILL (starvation, pothole roads, stray-dogs, garbage piled high like a cathedral spire) is the home of Aldrick Prospect whose life consists in preparing for his role of dragon during the two days of the annual Carnival; of Miss Cleothilda, a woman of middle age, the queen of the Hill because she is a mulatto and twenty years ago won a beauty contest. Sylvia, daughter of a hill-dweller, at seventeen, is ripening like a mango rose. She is lasciviously observed by Mr Guy, prosperous, old enough to be her father, offering to buy her costume for Carnival. Sylvia, however, offers herself to share with Aldrick his poverty stricken room which contains little besides the Dragon Costume, which Aldrick constructs every year. Aldrick divines that Guy aims at Sylvia and is thereby disturbed.

A most important inhabitant of Calvary is Fisheye, the Bad John. Bred in the country, his magnificent physique finds a fitting arena in the warrior bands of the Carnival — Genghis Khan, Attila, Spartacus, Alexander, Hitler, Conquistadors, bandits, U.S. Marines etc — all ceaselessly celebrating their warriorhood. Fish-eye, by his invincible warriorhood, lifts the CALVARY HILL steelband into the first rank. But big business begins to pat-



Earl Lovelace

ronise bands, which checks pugnacious behaviour. Fisheye is, with difficulty, restrained from wrecking sponsorship and respectability. He is militant on behalf of the People's National Movement, the new political party. P.N.M. wins the election but Fisheye can't understand what P.N.M. has won: white people are still in the banks and in the businesses along Frederick Street; the radio still speaks with a British voice.

The yard doesn't welcome an Indian, Pariag, who rents a room with his wife. Indians lower the tone of the hillites and Pariag is never invited even to play a game of all-fours. Pariag increases the

hostility of the hill by buying a bicycle. The Hill wrecks it.

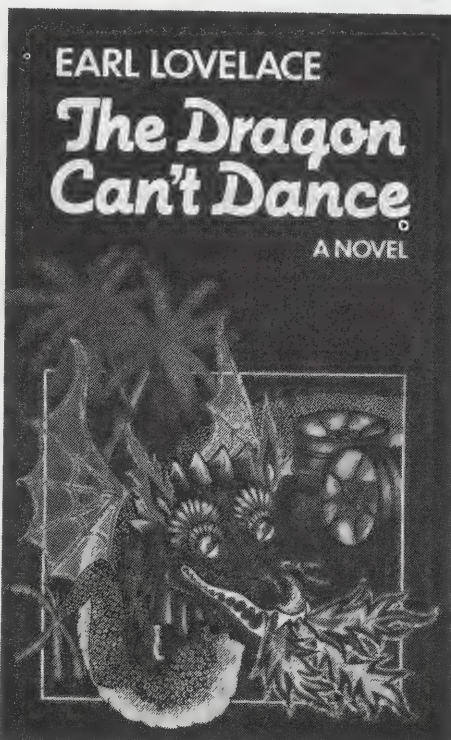
Everything and everybody on the Hill arrive at a climax at Carnival. The dynamic Sylvia is dancing in the band. Aldrick now passionately wants "to swirl with her and lose himself and gain himself in her." Sylvia says no, Guy is now her man.

As all great novels, this one now leaps. One dull day after Carnival, Fisheye, revolver in hand, fastens two policemen to their own jeep and with his friends they drive into Port-of-Spain. They create a sensation proclaiming that they are a revolutionary army, and that the people must revolt against oppression. The words are revolutionary in the best contemporary tradition, but they end inevitably in long jail sentences. However, the revolution is there, even if only symbolically.

In jail Fisheye decides that henceforth they must accommodate themselves to power. But Aldrick, after thought, denounces their revolutionary motor-ride; they were only demonstrating the power of the masters because they had not initiated anything independent. They were, as usual, waiting for the masters to do something. Now, out of prison, the new Aldrick knows that for him the old life is dead. He seeks Sylvia who is quite settled and is going to marry Guy, now a city councillor. He asks Sylvia to be herself, she refuses but after he leaves her turns and waves to her. She responds

Then comes the last chapter, a technical creation. Philo is a Calypsonian, hitherto remarkable only for his long pursuit of Miss Cleothilda. But Philo has won fame by a calypso advocating submission. He now lives in Diego Martin where capitalists flourish. He despises them, but he now listens to his old calypsos, which trace his own descent from rebellion. He re-reads an old review which praises his early work. Unhappy, he calls up his girlfriend, young, attractive and a Diego-Martin type. He leaves her asleep and visits Cleothilda, who has said that Sylvia will marry Guy. He refuses to believe that Guy's status and wealth can tame the resplendent Sylvia, even if he takes her to live in his new house in Diego Martin. Philo is uncertain but Cleothilda tells him that Sylvia, rejecting Guy, is seeking Aldrick. In this last chapter everything and everybody is put in place without a word of preaching from the author.

And Pariag, now a shopkeeper, has discovered that where he must seek further understanding and friendship is with his own neglected Indian wife. Nowhere have I seen more of the realities of a whole country disciplined into one imaginative volume.



POETRY

Pains Of Exile

Away by Andrew Salkey Allison & Busby, £3.00

Reviewed by Archie Markham

There is a disturbing thread of accusation running through Andrew Salkey's new book of poems. Here, he returns to the question of exile; not so much the pleasures/pains, but the danger of continued exile while we are still having difficulty pinning down that most elusive of concepts, home. Things have moved on from the days when just being away from the place you were born, entitled the self-exile to sympathy. Now, there are more deserving, more urgent cases: the refugee fleeing tanks, the dissident, the man with the kalishnikov. So how to reassess the position and not shield behind the old self-pity, the fake posture?

Andrew asks the question everyone asks: why don't we go home? Well, we do sometimes and find home to be smaller and shabbier than we remembered it. One poor man quickly saw that home was a dried river bed; [and] he knew he'd have to run away, again.

But why didn't those of greater vision, then, take the lead; teach, as it were, by example? In one poem, bringing the celebrated trio, Garvey, Padmore and Fanon together, Salkey confirms the worry:

Why didn't they return,
Africa on their minds,
our Caribbean gully dust,
Africa, vast enough
to dream about working for,
old enough to escape to,
deep enough to drown in,
home, far enough away from home?

Because most of us end up adopting postures in-between these two, our Atlantic-divided minds at a loss, our exile has

become complacent.

There can be value, though, in exile. Andrew admits that you have to be away from home, sometimes, to get over the need to leave a particular island/spot; to give you an unblinkered view of the region as a whole. Though for one woman, and who are we to say she is untypical,

All the green leaves
seem to be turning brown
in her clenched fist
of lost chances

There are poems here, too, which remind us of Salkey's poems for Chile sequence, 'In The Hills Where Her Dreams Live'. There he shows the Woman, the Widow,

the Survivor, walking out of the man-made wreckage, scarred but defiant. And there is a portrait here in 'Away' (whether at home or abroad, it's equally authentic) of the woman, coping in silence, defending her sea-split marriage. It is she and her many sisters whom we ignore at our peril. The Africa gazers, and those who romanticise 'home', must understand that she, like the Eritrean Revolutionary Women Fighters, need to sit down with her re-educated man, to defend her freedom.

Andrew Salkey invites us to make that commitment. What is especially pleasing about these poems is that they don't lie to us and their challenge comes beautifully crafted; and their language is elegant.

BROKEN DREAMS

On The Other Side Of The Fence

by Errol J. Wynter

Spitalfields Books, £1.35

Reviewed by Leslie Wills

Though 'On the Other Side of the Fence' is written during Errol J. Wynter's imprisonment, the collection of poems deals more with the heavily partitioned world outside it. His are the 'broken dreams' and inequalities that suffocate the black population and working classes in Britain. It is a world Wynter knows well and he is able to describe all its main features and its mutations. His subjects are social and



political clichés. They range from the unemployed, the one parent mother, the hustler; the puppet like workers a "cast with trowning masks"; the tower-block culture, Zimbabwe; from Margaret Thatcher to Bristol. Even his more personal themes of a fatherless childhood, reunion with his son or "the man that we forgot" draw from the broad fount of the black experience.

His mood shifts from defeatism (natural enough considering his environment) to stirring evocations. He recognises himself as a member of a 'social dilemma' but is wary of alternatives. His projection of life is informed but at the same time objective. At times he idealises or romanticises, then, finally, recourses to religion to hide his despair.

Only the poem 'On the Other Side of the Fence' actually deals with his physical imprisonment. Wynter admits that the things he speaks of are so real and overwhelming to him that he feels powerless to compute these experiences. He comes close enough, though, for we feel his description of prison with its "Filth of

years that knows no time". He describes the concussionary effects of prison:

"Reality's brutal fist
Descends a frightful darkened mist"

His simple yet sophisticated style is suited to the moral fables he often tells. We see it at its best in "The Hustler" who

"By daytime she's her daughters pride
By night she pays the price."

His montone of 'Can'ts', repeated throughout the poem, successfully conveys mental oppression as the insistent ravaging of the mind. Here, his style compounds his defeatism. His recognition of a 'system' gaining ground, consuming us.

Sometimes Wynter displays the playfulness of the West Indian ballad tradition as he toys with and enjoys the relationships of words:

"I have finished my education
And am filled with great expectations
As I enter the jaws of civilisation"

Here, there are echoes of 'Big Youth' of Jamaica, and old Kaisonians like Lord Pretender who sought to impress the command of English on the still patios speaking Trinidadians.

Wynter's work is an important and accurate chronicle of the time, but falls short because of his lack of overall perspective. He is preoccupied with effects of the 'system', but does not want to go further. Sometimes there is no need, eg, "Big sister is watching you", with its reference to 'Thought Police'. And Orwellian 1984 imagery is frighteningly enough in the present.

But often we are drowned in truisms. Description follows description without perspective, muting his despair and rendering his cries passive.

All this being said, his sermonising, his fear of extremism, his idealism, his nostalgic lapses and finally his succumbment to religion as escapism represent the spectrum of most black responses to the situation in Britain. The collection of poems makes thoughtful and unburdened reading.

Other Publications From Race Today Publications

**The Road Make to Walk on Carnival Day –
the Battle for the West Indian Carnival in
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This pamphlet, by the Race Today Collective, is a collection of articles outlining the origins, and development of the Notting Hill Carnival, and the struggles to keep it on the streets of Notting Hill, London. Price: £1.00.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

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PLAYS

Coon Show

Three Plays *Gloo Joo/Full Frontal/ For the West (Uganda)*

by Michael Hastings Penguin Plays £1.50

Reviewed by Akua Rugg

Michael Hastings is a British writer whose prolific output (short stories, novels and plays) has won him several awards here and in the U.S.A. As one of these awards is television's equivalent of an 'Oscar', Hastings can be identified as an artist whose work is guaranteed maximum exposure and respectful attention.

In Britain, he has carved a niche for himself as a writer on the subject of race. Three plays he has written on this subject, 'Gloo Joo', 'Full Frontal' and 'For the West (Uganda)', received rave reviews in the Press. 'Gloo Joo', despite a recession in the theatre, is currently enjoying a revival in the West End. When it first opened, London's most widely circulated evening paper hailed it as the comedy of the year. 'Full Frontal' and 'For the West (Uganda)', did not have the popular success of their predecessor; they achieved the intellectual and artistic kudos of being staged at The Royal Court, a prestigious venue for radical and revolutionary drama about contemporary issues.

The plays, which have now been published in one volume by Penguin Books, offer the opportunity to study what a white writer of great renown has to say about blacks at this point in time.

There is a common structure to all the plays. Hastings presents a black protagonist and the forces ranged against him. In 'Gloo Joo', Meadowlark Rachel Warner is an illegal Jamaican immigrant attempting to evade deportation. How he succeeds in this endeavour enables Hastings to express what he thinks of

the West Indian way of going about things. Not very much as it turns out. His description of Warner's personality and behaviour characterises West Indians as the idiots of the global village, relying on low cunning rather than on a developed intelligence to see them through. By the end of the play, because Hastings has attributed not one admirable human characteristic to Warner, he appears not so much a person, more a performing animal, jumping at his white creator's commands. When, in the play a white character asks Warner, "You didn't mind me calling you a black bastard the odd time", he obligingly replies "long as a can call you a white one". Such a black does not exist in reality. Warner is a figment of an essentially racist imagination and an optimistic one at that.

Gabriel Nkoko, the hero of 'Full Frontal' is Nigerian. He is also mad. Discovering that a West Indian has run off with his woman, he decides to join the National Front, the most notorious of Britain's fascist organisations. Much of the dialogue of the play, which is in the form of a monologue, consists of Gabriel hurling abuse at West Indians. To gain entrance to the Front's premises, Gabriel pleads "... I ain't West-Indian man. Got dignity man. Don't confuse me now. I'm not jah roots Caribbean dreadlocks man." Hastings, under cover of purporting to show the corrosive and corrupting effects of racism on society in general, uses the course of events in the play to belittle West Indians and their culture in particular. His use of a black character to denigrate other blacks is a pernicious

device he has already used in 'Gloo Joo', implying, as it does, that racism is not a phenomenon peculiar to white society. Hastings' choice of the NF as the organisation Gabriel tries to join makes a mockery of the fact that blacks are presently struggling against racism in this country in a systematic, disciplined and intelligent fashion.

The last play in the collection, 'For the West (Uganda)', contains many themes introduced in 'Gloo Joo' and developed upon in 'Full Frontal'. Hastings' choice of the dreaded Idi Amin as the hero of this play allows Hastings to expand to the full his favourite theme of the black man's inhumanity to the black man. What distinguishes this play from its predecessors is that unlike Warner and Gabriel, Idi is shown resisting rather than accommodating attempts by whites to oppress him. Hastings, however, structures the play to show that Idi's power to determine his own destiny and that of his people is based on delusions. Much of the play's action takes place in a dream of Idi's, as if, for Hastings, the very idea of black power is something that is "out of this world."

None of the plays by way of plot, or delineation of character shows the slightest respect for blacks. On the contrary, they are a contemporary version of the traditional 'coon' shows and serve much the same purpose. In every one of the plays, the mannerisms and conditions of the lives of blacks are held up to ridicule for a white audience's delectation and edification as blacks do not generally, in this country, patronise the theatre. The plays reinforce all the banal racist stereotypes; that blacks are amoral, immoral, feckless, stupid, ignorant and unprincipled. Any white attending these plays must come away reassured that blacks are not a force that poses any serious threat to the continuing supremacy of whites.

FILMS

FILMS AND FILM MAKERS Black American Film Festival Paris, October 1980 Reviewed by Angela Martin

During the last two weeks of October, 10 black American filmmakers represented their own and others' work — at two venues in Paris. 10 features, 6 medium-length films (45-60 mins) and 29 shorts were shown.

There were documentary and fiction films, TV discussion and arts programmes, agit-prop and experimental art films. For example, 'I am Somebody' by Madeleine Anderson documents the struggle of women hospital workers in Charleston, Carolina, during 1969. A 113 day strike for better wages and union recognition led to a confrontation with the National Guard: Henry Miller's 'The Death of a Dunbar Girl' is the film version, made in 1977, of a stage drama about the conflict between a mother with dark skin and white mentality and her light-skinned, but culturally more black, daughter. In 'A Place in Time' (1976), Charles Lane has taken the burlesque tradition of Charles Chaplin and Buster Keaton to make a silent satire about survival, through episodes in the street life of a portrait artist. And in sharp contrast, again, is the TV series 'Black Journal', from which an excellent film by Madeline Anderson about Malcolm X was shown.

Of course, black productions are not new in the American cinema. Indeed, given the blatantly racist images of black people in early (white) films — of which the most famous is DW Griffith's 'Birth of a Nation' (1915) — it very quickly, and not surprisingly, became crucial for black people to start filmmaking work against such visual and narrative definitions. Oscar Micheaux set up his film company in Harlem during 1918 and Emmett J Scott made 'Birth of a Race' in 1916 as a counter irritant to Griffith's film. (The film has only recently been

re-discovered.) But Micheaux was almost the only black filmmaker in the 20s and 30s to escape the clutches of white production control, and the Paris festival showed one of his films — 'God's Step Children', 1938.

Since this early period, control over black images by white production executives has become an increasingly subtle layer upon layer of sophistication, with films aimed at black audiences (Shaft, 'Cotton Come to Harlem', 'Enter the Dragon', etc.) and utilising black talent to prop up an ailing Hollywood. More recent examples are 'Roots' — in which the salaries of all the black actors did not add up to even one of the white actors' salaries — and the dramatisation of Martin Luther King's life, both for TV. Again, the need for black people to assume control became urgent, as was the importance of producing films such as 'Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song', (made in 1971 and never before this year shown in this country; and only now in the London Film Festival, not on general release). Such films had been made independently and without concession to white imagery, liberal or otherwise. (Sydney Poitier etc)

The more recent wave of independent, black, film production began in the second part of the 60s and really took off in the 70s, a time of great social upheaval on the racial/political front in the US. All but a few of the films were made with grants from the various filmmaking foundations, but these are rarely large enough to cover the material, the hassles and the labour. Many of the filmmakers help each other out and the same names often appear in the credits of a number of films in one capacity or another. For example, on the west coast, Charles Burnett, a director in his own right, did the photo-

graphy for Sharon Larkin's 'Your Children Come Back to You' and Billy Woodberry's 'The Pocket Book'; Larry Clark did the photography for one by Pamela Jones, who acted in his film, 'Passing Through', and in Ben Caldwell's 'I and I'.

Such cooperation has necessarily extended to marketing and distributing. Filmmaker, Warrington Hudlin, and historian, George P Cunningham, set up The Black Filmmaker Foundation in New York to administer the Black Filmmaker Cooperative Distribution Service, and the annual summer 'Dialogues with Black Filmmakers' community tour. In 1979, they organised a 'Filmmobile' outdoor screening tour of 64 New York City areas. They also provide a programme service for education, festivals, conferences, etc.

In addition, there is the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, which works as a powerful lobby, and Independent Feature Projects, which provides a marketing service for black films. All three operate mainly on the east coast, which is obviously a considerable distance from California, where other groups are working. (Before Paris a few of the filmmakers only knew each other by name.) But earlier this year, the BFF organised a National Conference of Black Independent Filmmakers, which some 100 people attended from across the country.

But if the need for collective organisation is clear, the filmmaking approaches certainly are neither uniform nor singular in their representation of the black experience. Julie Dash, in 'Four Women' (1978, 7 mins) based on the Nina Simone song, traces the image of women from Africa to the struggle for survival in America, while Jackie Shearer, working

with 3 other women on 'A Minor Altercation' (1977, 30 mins) produced a fiction film for educational use, in which a fight between a black and a white girl leads to a comparison of the way their families deal with the situation. Jackie Shearer has been working since then on other people's films and scripts but is currently preparing her own first feature, a docu-fiction set in the 30s.

One of the most, impressive features shown was Charles Burnett's 'Killer of Sheep' (1977, 83 mins.), made for the ridiculous budget of \$10,000 (around £4000). Stan has a job in a slaughterhouse, but just as the killing of sheep has taken on an increasingly sophisticated form, so too has the form of killing the man. The pay is not enough to keep his family, their living conditions feel like a chicken hut, the kids play on the streets and he becomes more and more out of touch with his wife. The film is photographed and edited with great sensitivity, intercutting the fiction with shots of the slaughtering process and a subtle selection of music (which makes for a very telling contrast with the gratuitously spectacular use of music in 'Blue Collar'). And while the film shows the conditions of oppression, it does not itself oppress its characters with a notion of them as jive-ass idiots or pathetic victims, nor does the expression of the main male character's alienation take on the proportions of machismo.

Another feature, quite different, and very complex, was 'Still a Brother', made in 1964 (an extremely surprising date when one sees it) for the public TV network (ie nationwide). William Greaves, its director, has done some very important work on TV — becoming, in 1968, executive producer of 'Black Journal', a regular programme on which a number of younger filmmakers have had the chance to work. 'Still a Brother', looks at the black American middle-class through 90 mins. of close interviewing and careful structuring. The facts and figures, the examples of achievement on white terms, the 'evening of elegance', the graduate 'coming out' balls are not criticised as such, but their juxtaposition with other material — the history of slavery, police violence, sequences of struggle — especially the irony clear. And the title is borne out frequently by the experiences recounted and the comments made: "You're still a brother and you have to recognise this — we cannot offer the Rap Browns up as sacrificial lambs; 'I didn't use to associate myself with the recipients of welfare, but now I see they're my people.'" Then, ultimately, the millionaire, Percy Julian, who, like everyone else, has his own

story about being stopped by the police and treated like any other 'nigger'.



A scene from 'Black at Yale'

Warrington Hudlin's documentary short — 'Black at Yale' — further explored, 10 years later (1974) an aspect of the assimilation problematic. In this 50 mins. film, he interviews two black guys on the Yale campus. One has gone through the system and enjoys the academic work, but feels isolated from both the white students who can't relate to him and the activist brothers who think he's wasting his people's time. The loneliness of this student, filmed in his study where he is surrounded by the 'best' of English-speaking literature, is sharply contrasted with the other interviewee, who is not officially registered as a student. He has no academic experience and no qualifications, but he knows exactly what he — as a black man — wants out of the place, and can therefore, despite having no money, no place to stay and no recognition from anyone, move through the shit with staggering efficiency. (This guy has now been accepted at Harvard, where he is studying philosophy).

Alongside the screenings were a number of debates which were quite difficult to organise because of the need to translate

everything each way. But this was a rare opportunity for Africans living in France, together with people from Martinique and the Antilles, to meet and discuss with brothers and sisters from the States. The systematic withholding of information became concretely specific with examples such as the recent murder in the states of 7 black children and 5 (black and white) Marxists, the latter victims also left with their hearts ripped out. It's equally certain that Americans hear little if anything about the increasingly oppressive anti-immigration laws in France, and the disturbingly high number of murdered North Africans. Indeed, at the same time as the festival, Simon Maley, editor of 'Afrique-Asie' and a black American who has lived in France with his family for some 11 years, was picked up off the street by the French police and put onto a plane for the States. His deportation has hardly caused the flutter of a copy editor's eye-lash, and even a former colleague of his in Paris hadn't heard about it.

The problem was further highlighted when one of the filmmakers referred to a US government plan to make communication between black people in the States and liberation movements elsewhere more and more difficult. It is quite clear that very little is — or certainly not as much as ought to be — known about black American films here. Work has been going on to get some of them to Britain, and is continuing. However, such events cost a great deal. The event in Paris received a grant of £10,000 from a major audiovisual shop, FNAC, in order to pay research fees, air fares, freight charges and rentals on the films. Five of the filmmakers were paid for by the Ford Foundation. Entry to the films were free, and even at the Paris Black Theatre was no more than 50p. The attitude to cultural events in France is lamentably different from the one experienced here. But it is only with a budget like this that one can hope to bring filmmakers as well as their films into Britain so that a meaningful dialogue can take place with them, and that at least communication on that level cannot be so easily blocked.

NO WAR IN THIS BABYLON

Babylon

A film directed by Franco Rosso

Distributed by Osiris Films

Reviewed by Eden Charles

Babylon is directed by Franco Rosso and scripted by Martin Stellman. Both are white and of respectable pedigree in the film industry. The film is important both

for what it does and does not do.

It concerns itself with that section of young, West Indian blacks who are either part of the organisation of sound systems,

(mobile discos), or who follow them. The main characters are members of a sound system with the exotic sobriquet, 'Ital Lion'.

The film begins with the semi-finals of a sound system competition, and Ital Lion are the people's choice. In the final they meet Jah Shaka, one of the top sound systems in Britain.

Moments in the lives of the major character, Blue, and other members of Ital Lion, leading up to that encounter, provide the substance of the movie. These moments are invariably characterised by conflict, and those responsible for this film could not avoid the lure of the conflict between the races. After all, it turns a quick buck among those who are bankrupt for creative ideas.

The white residents, who inhabit a block of flats opposite the converted warehouse where the sound system

narcissistic. Superficial characterisations of ghetto blacks in Britain came much closer to reality than anything we have seen to date.

Of all the characters it is Blue, played by Brinsley Forde of the reggae group Aswad, who is the most fully explored. Forde turns in a fine, natural performance. Blue is the toaster of the sound at night and a motor mechanic during the day. His younger brother refuses to go to school. His parents cannot understand either of their sons. Unable to stand the hassles at home, Blue leaves. He faces discrimination at work and leaves that. He is harassed, assaulted and arrested by the police merely for walking the streets at night. His girlfriend is out with another guy when he needs her most, and he leaves her as well. All this leaving has to stop, and when confronted by one of the whites from the flats, he stabs him.

hands covering his bloodied face. An innocent victim of the victimised. This sequence contributes absolutely nothing to the film. It is unadulterated racist trash.

Trevor Laird's portrayal of Beefy is an ebullient but unsuccessful assault on the limitations of the film. Beefy is the British born black who takes shit from nobody, the most aggressive member of the sound. It is he who has to be held back, flick knife in hand, from retaliating against the whites in the flats. He leads a raid on a school to replace a smashed speaker-box and smashes the rear lights of Jah Shaka's van. It is Beefy who draws a machette when approached by some avengers in a dance hall. All this he does with a certain amount of style and charm.

Throughout the movie, Aswad and the legendary Dennis Bovell provide an impressive musical score which, however, fails to mesh with the visual imagery.

There are a couple of aspects to this film which irritate. Older black actors, whose accents are identifiably not Jamaican, try with varying degree of persistence, to sound as if they were. It is the ability of younger actors who, weaving patois and cockney, manage to successfully reproduce the dialect of Black London. Then we are inundated with the ridiculous, almost Monty Python sub-titles. They do not translate the dialogue, they merely repeat it. For example, when Beefy states that the dog he has just acquired is for his 'ltection', that is the word that faithfully appears at the bottom of the screen. Sometimes the sub-titles appear before the spoken words, which resulted in responses to jokes before they had been uttered.

And finally, the film comes to a close. Dreadhead has managed to borrow a complete sound system from a friend. Blue starts to toast over a tune. The police arrive and there is a rush for the side exits when the news is announced. Others begin to barricade themselves in. Blue, toasting on the mike, says the time for running is over. "We caan tek no more of dat", he intones over and over again. The police are breaking their way in and the whole audience waits expectantly, tensely to view the inevitable battle. But there is no climax to this film, and no war in this Babylon. The screen is blank, the film is over, the credits start to roll as Blue toasts, "we caan tek no more of dat".

This disgraceful ending is the ultimate cop-out in a superficial piece of cinematography. Despite some enjoyable sketches, Babylon remains a cheap, poorly produced movie. Had the characters been white in a comparable situation, I doubt whether it would have found its way onto the screen.



The Ital Lions

equipment is stored, break into the warehouse and smash the equipment to pieces. The whites are portrayed simplistically as being uniformly and vociferously racist.

Race relations in all its vulgarity are not a source for serious art and drama. Its inherent superficiality militates against the creative portrayal of human relations. Yet a hard core of mediocre artists persists in this sad and sorry spectacle.

I saw the film on a Saturday night in Brixton. The audience largely comprised the living models from which the celluloid characters were cast. They had come to see themselves and they were not disappointed as a certain walk, a facial expression, a skank generated cheers of recognition and appreciation. The audience roared their approval at the drop of a 'raasclaat'. Throughout there was a virtual love affair between the audience and the film characters which verged on the

He works with a white guy called Ronnie who begins to hang around with the sound. Ronnie, an ex-skinhead of the 'my boy lollipop' generation, has moved with blacks for some time. He is easily accepted into the sound, in spite of Dreadhead the controller, who warns that he is not an 'Ital Lion'. He is soon skanking alongside the other members of the sound to the tune that Dreadhead has acquired at great and varied cost. Ronnie comes over as a real nice if simple guy.

Ronnie's apparent easy and relaxed relationship with the members of Ital Lion is severely jolted when the racists in the flats break into the lock-up under the bridge, smashing all the speaker-boxes and spraying racist slogans on the walls. Accusing eyes greet Ronnie as he steps through the door. Beefy assaults him and no one comes to his assistance. They all file past, leaving him on the floor, his

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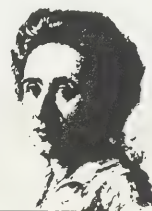
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